LESBIANS SPEAK OUT

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THE PSYCHOANALYSTS OF EDWARD THE DYKE

Behind the brown door which bore the gilt letters of Dr. Merlin Knox's name, Edward the Dyke was lying on the doctor's couch which was so luxurious and long that her feet did not even hang over the edge.

'Dr. Knox,' Edward began, 'my problem this week is chiefly concerning restrooms.'

'Aahh,' the good doctor sighed. Gravely he drew a quick sketch of a restroom in his notebook.

'Naturally I can't go into men's restroom without feeling like an interloper, but on the other hand every time I try to use the ladies room I get into trouble.'

'Umm,' said Dr. Knox, drawing a quick sketch of a door marked 'Ladies'.

'Four days ago I went into the powder room of a department store and three middle-aged housewives came in and thought I was a man. As soon as I explained to them that I was really only a harmless dyke, the trouble began...'

'You compulsively attacked them.'

'Oh heavens no, indeed not. One of them turned on the water faucet and tried to drown me with wet paper towels, but the other two began screaming something about howwell did I know Gertrude Stein and what sort of underwear did I have on, and they took my new cuff links and socks for souvenirs. They had my head in the trash can and were cutting pieces off my shirttail when luckily a policeman heard my calls for help and rushed in. He was able to divert their attention by shooting at me, thus giving me a chance to escape through the window.'

Carefully Dr. Knox noted in his notebook: 'Apparent suicide attempt after accosting girls in restroom' 'My child,' he murmured in featherly tones, 'have no fear. You must trust us. We will cure you of this deadly affliction, and before you know it you'll be all fluffy and wonderful with dear babies and a bridge club of your very own.' He drew a quick sketch of a bridge club. 'Now let me see. I believe we estimated that after only four years of intensive therapy and two years of anti-intensive therapy, plus a few minor physical changes and you'll be exactly the little girl we've always wanted you to be.' Rapidly Dr. Knox thumbed through an index on his desk. 'Yes yes. This year the normal cup size is 56 inches. And waist 12 and 1/2. Nothing a few well-place hormones can't accomplish in these advanced times. How tall did you tell me you were?'

'Six feet, four inches,' replied Edward.

'Oh, tsk tsk.' Dr. Knox did some figuring. 'Yes, I'm afraid that will definitely entail extracting approximately 8 inches from each leg, including the knee-cap--standing a lot doesn't bother you, does it my dear?'

'Uh,' said Edward, who couldn't decide.

"I assure you the surgeon I have in mind for you is remarkably successful.' He leaned far back in his chair. 'Now tell me, briefly, what the word 'homosexuality' means to you, in your own words."

'Love flowers pearl, of delighted arms. Warm and water. Melting of vanilla wafer in the pants. Pink petal roses trembling overdew on the lips, soft of juicy fruit. No teeth. No nasty spit. Lips chewing oysters without grimy sand or whiskers. Pastry. Gingerbread. Warm, sweet bread. Cinnamon toast poetry. Justice equality higher wages. Independent angel song. It means I can do what I want.'

"Now my dear,' Dr. Knox said, 'Your disease has gotten completely out of control. We scientists know of course that it's a highly pleasurable experience to take someone's penis or vagina into your mouth--it's pleasurable and enjoyable. Everyone knows that. But after you've taken a thousand pleasurable penises or vaginas into your mouth and had a thousand people take your pleasurable penis

or vagina in their mouth, what have you accomplished? What do you have to show for it? Do you have a wife or children or a husband or a home or a

trip to Europe? Do you have a bridge club to show for it? No! You have only a thousand pleasurable experiences to show for it. Do you see how you're missing the meaning of life? How sordid and depraved are these clandestine sexual escapades in parks and restrooms? I ask you."

"But sir but sir," said Edward, "I'm a woman. I don't have sexual escapades in parks or restrooms. I don't have a thousand lovers--I have one lover."

"Yes yes." Dr. Knox flicked the ashes from his cigar, onto the floor. "Stick to the subject, my dear."

"We were in college then," Edward said. She came to me out of the silky midnight mist, her slips rustling like cow thieves, her hair blowing in the wind like Gabriel. Lying in my arms harps played soft in the dry firelight, Oh Bach. Oh Brahms. Oh Buxtehude. How sweetly we got along how well we got the woods pregnant with canaries and parakeets, barefoot in the grass alas pigeons, but it only lasted ten years and she was gone, poof! like a puff of wheat."

"You see the folly of these brief, physical embraces. But tell me the results of our experiment we arranged for you last session."

"Oh yes. My real date. Well I bought a dress and a wig and a girdle and a squeezy bodice. I did unspeakable things to my armpits with a razor. I had my hair done and my face done and my nails done. My roast done. My bellybutton done."

"And then you felt truly feminine."

"I felt truly immobilized. I could no longer run, walk bend stoop move my arms or spread my feet apart."

"Good, good."

"Well, everything went pretty well during dinner, except my date was only 5'3" and oh yes. One of my eyelashes fell into the soup--that wasn't too bad. I hardly noticed it going down. But then my other eyelash fell on my escort's sleeve and he spent five minutes trying to kill it."

Edward sighed. "But the worst part came when we stood up to go. I rocked back on my heels as I pushed my chair back under the table and my shoes--you see they were three inchers, raising me to 6'7", and with all my weight on those teeny little heels...."

"Yes yes."

"I drove the spikes all the way into the thick carpet and could no longer move. Oh, everyone was nice about it. My escort offered to get the check and to call in the morning to see how I had made out and the manager found a little saw and all. But, Dr. Knox, you must understand that my underwear was terribly binding and the room was hot..."

"Yes yes."

"So I fainted. I didn't mean to, I just did. That's how I got my ankles broken."

Dr. Knox cleared his throat. "It's obvious to me, young lady, that you have failed to control your P.E."

"My God," said Edward, glancing quickly at her crotch, "I took a bath just before I came."

"This oral eroticism of yours is definitely rooted in Penis Envy, which showed when you deliberately castrated your date by publicly embarrassing him."

Edward moaned. 'But strawberries. But lemon cream pie.'

'Narcissism,' Dr. Knox droned, 'Masochism, Sadism. Admit you want to kill your mother.'

'Marshmellow bluebird,' Edward groaned, eyes softly rolling. 'Looking at the stars. April in May.'

'Admit you want to possess your father. Mother substitute. Breast suckle.'

'Graham cracker subway,' Edward writhed, slobbering. 'Pussy willow summer.'

'Admit you have a smegmatic personality,' Dr. Knox intoned.

Edward rolled to the floor. 'I am vile! I am vile!'

Dr. Knox flipped a switch at his elbow and immediately a picture of a beautiful woman appeared on a screen over Edward's head. The doctor pressed another switch and electric shocks jolted through her spine. Edward screamed. He pressed anotherswitch, stopping the flow of electricity. Another switch and a photo of a male organ flashed on the screen, coated in powdered sugar. Dr. Knox gave Edward a lollipop.

She sat up. 'I'm saved,' she said, tonguing the lollipop.

'Your time is up,' Dr. Knox said. 'Your check please. Come back next week.

'Yes sir yes sir,' said Edward as she went out the brown door. In his notebook, Dr. Knox made a quick sketch of his bank.

THE REALITIES OF LESBIANISM

The Lesbian minority in America, which may run as high as ten million women, is probably the least understood of all minorities and the most downtrodden. She has two strikes on her from the start; she is a woman and she is a homosexual, a minority scorned by the vast majority of people in our country. If, in addition, she is a member of a racial minority, it is hard sometimes to understand how she survives.

A Lesbian is a woman who prefers another woman as a sexual partner; a woman who is drawn erotically to women rather than to men. This definition includes women who have never experienced overt sexual relations with a woman--the key word is "prefers." There is really no other valid way to define the Lesbian, for outside of the sexual area she is as different in her actions, dress, status and behavior as anyone else. Just as there is no typical heterosexual woman, neither is there any typical Lesbian.

However, there is a popular misconception, or stereotype, of the Lesbian. She is believed to embody all the worst masculine attributes of toughness, aggressiveness, lack of emotion, lack of sentiment, overemphasis on sex, lack of stability--the need and desire to dress as a man or, at least, as much like a man as possible.

At some time in her life the Lesbian may fit this stereotype--usually when she is very young and just finding out about herself. After all, the Lesbian is a product of her heterosexual environment and all she has to go on, at her first awareness of Lesbian feeling in herself, is society's image. Part of the reason for her over-masculinization is the sexual identity of being attracted to women. At this point the Lesbian feels that in order to be attractive to another woman she must appear masculine. Another reason is for identification purposes. How will she meet other Lesbians? How will they know her to be one of them unless she indicates herself in her outward appearance? A third reason is one of releasing her hostility against society, of defying the mores which she finds stifling to what she considers her very being. A fourth reason is comfort. Any woman who says that girdles and high heels are comfortable is simply lying.

While it is true that occasionally a Lesbian gets trapped in this way of life (emulation of the male) and never finds her way to being a person rather than a symbol, the vast majority pass through this phase and learn to accept their femininity. As a Lesbian she comes to realize she is a human being first, a woman second, and a Lesbian only third. Unfortunately, however, society places the emphasis on the third--sexual identification--and does not acknowledge the Lesbian as a woman or a person.

But the average Lesbian (if there can be anything approaching "average" in our very complex world) is indistinguishable from other women in dress, in manner, in goals and desires, in actions and in interests. The difference lies only in that she looks to women for her emotional and sexual fulfillment. She is a member of the family--a distant cousin, or perhaps, a maiden aunt. But more than likely she's closer to home--maybe a daughter, a wife and mother,

a grandmother or a sister. She may work in an office, in a factory production line, in the public school system, at the corner grocery. She is not bound by lines of class distinction or educational level, race or religion.

What causes a woman to become a Lesbian? How can it be that two sisters, raised by the same parents in the same home, can turn in two different directions--one toward heterosexuality, the other toward homosexuality? Very simply, the answer is that no one knows. A great deal of research and study has been done in this country on the male homosexual, but very little has been done on the Lesbian. The reason for this, we suspect, lies in the status of women in our country. Because the male--masculinity--is so highly valued, it has been deemed to be imperative to search out the reasons for any deviation from this American norm. Also, the majority of persons working in research are men. Research on the Lesbian has, for the most part, been confined to women who were either psychiatric patients or in prison--which hasn't made for a very full or accurate picture.

Nevertheless, if you begin reading about the "causes" of homosexuality you will find that, as in the Bible, the answer you want to find will be somewhere. Each "expert" on the subject presents a different "cause." Our feeling, which is supported by a growing number of professional persons, is that homosexuality (in both men and women) is merely one dimension of the vastly complicated and varied spectrum of human sexuality. There has always been homosexuality; it has appeared in almost every culture in recorded history; it occurs in every species of animal.

Perhaps the most logical and least hysterical of all statements about homosexuality is the following made by Dr. Joel Fort, psychiatrist and public health specialist; Dr. Evelyn G. Hooker, research psychologist at the University of California at Los Angeles, Dr. Joe K. Adams, psychologist and former mental health officer in California. The statement, made in August of 1966, is as follows:

> Homosexuals, like heterosexuals, should be treated as individual human beings, not as a special group, either by law or social agencies or employers.
>
> Laws governing sexual behavior should be reformed to deal only with clearly antisocial behavior, such as behavior involving violence or youth. The sexual behavior of individual adults by mutual consent in private should not be a matter of public concern.
>
> Some homosexuals, like some heterosexuals, are ill; some homosexuals, like some heterosexuals, are preoccupied with sex as a way of life. But probably for a majority of adults their sexual orientation constitutes only one component of a much more complicated life style.

Why then, if the Lesbian is by and large indistinguishable from other women and if her sexuality is not abnormal, does she face such genuine problems in her search for self-fulfillment? For struggle she does against myriad obstacles presented to her by a hostile society. Through our work with the Daughters of Bilities, Inc., a Lesbian organization started in

San Francisco in 1955, we have talked to literally thousands of Lesbians (and almost as many male homosexuals). And, although each case is different, each person individual, through all is a searching for self-identity and self-fulfillment to the utmost of the person's ability.

Consider the stereotyped "box" most women in this country are placed in from birth: that of becoming wife and mother, nothing else. Consider then, the girl brought up in this box who finds her sexual identification to be Lesbian. How then express the "wife-and-mother" role? This conflict often starts the process of self-searching which goes on for years and which, for some, is never resolved.

Toward a Quaker View of Sex, which came out of England and is more enlightened than most religious treatises on male homosexuality, fails utterly in its chapter on the female homosexual. The only statement with which we can agree is the first sentence: "Homosexuality is probably as common in women as it is in men." The Quaker view of the Lesbian is apparently that of the wishy-washy, namby-pamby old maid who holds hands with another old maid (or preferably an adoring younger girl, if available) because she never was able to catch a man and fulfill her deep yearning for the rewards of the pangs of childbirth. At least the American stereotype of the predatory, aggressive masculine woman has a little more color!

The Quaker view indicates that woman's prime requisite is her "maternal tenderness," that her only reason for being is to have babies, and that the Lesbian is warped and frustrated because she isn't doing her fair share toward the population explosion. To this question of maternity we must point out that the mere possession of biological machinery to produce babies has no correlation whatever with the attributes of motherhood. Let's face it--many women can have babies but make lousy mothers.

The art of motherhood in the human species is not instinctual. It is learned. We have courses in the care of the baby, and there are countless books on the market to help the young mother with the problems she may encounter during the course of her child's growth and development. In some cultures, babies are taken from the mothers and raised by the community without any apparent psychically traumatic results for the biological mothers or their offspring. In other cultures it is the male who tends the young.

It simply does not follow, then, that every Lesbian is suffering untold qualms because she is frustrating her "natural" birthright for giving birth. There are many other ways for women to contribute creatively to society, and at this particular point in the history of the population of our globe, they may also be highly desirable. The Lesbian who does feel frustrated because she doesn't have any children of her own may work in the teaching profession, she may be a playground director or a social worker who comes in contact with families and children. But the majority of Lesbians we have known have not expressed in any way the "void" they feel because they have no children. To the contrary, the expression, "I would prefer to lead a heterosexual life if I could," is much more apt to come from the male homosexual than from the female.

It must be said, however, that there are many Lesbians who are raising

children--some successfully, some not so successfully. The rate of success is, of course, determined by the degree of self-acceptance and self-assurance of the mother, and the permanence and stability of her relationship to her Lesbian partner. It takes guts, grit and determination. For if a mother is determined to be a Lesbian the courts will assume she is an "unfit mother" on the face of it and take her children away from her. It seems children must have the protection of heterosexuals, regardless. The fact that all homosexuals are products of heterosexuality seems to escape those who would judge the homosexual relationship.

The teenage Lesbian has a particular problem which has not been met. Homophile organizations, like the Daughters of Bilities, have had to refuse membership to those under 21 for fear that they will be charged with "contributing to the delinquency of a minor." The teenager has no one to turn to. Society thinks only in terms of counseling of the variety that would tend toward reestablishing the sexual identity in heterosexual vein, and the teenage Lesbian is whisked off by her parents to the family doctor or clergyman to put a stop to this nonsense. However, in the cases that have come to our attention, the teenager has no doubt about her sexual orientation. What she wants to know is what to do about it. She wants to meet others like herself; she wants to socialize and to discuss the problems she faces. She is looking for Lesbian models, those who have worked out their problems and have established long-term relationships.

When she is denied this social outlet, she very often winds up in unsavory areas of a city like the Tenderloin in San Francisco. There she may find other youth, but she also finds herself in the company of prostitutes, pimps, drug addicts and dope peddlers. There has been several attempts in various cities to set up coffee houses where there is dancing for the teenage homosexual. But they have lacked the influential backing of, say, the church, to provide protection against police harassment while creating a wholesome social fabric for the teenage homosexual.

Because of the absence of role models in working out her way of life, and because the only marriage she has known is that of Mom and Dad, the young Lesbian usually gets hung up in the "butch-femme" syndrome in her early relationships. It is only with painful experience that she learns the Lesbian is attracted to a woman--not a cheap imitation of a man. The lasting Lesbian liaison (and there are many) is one based on mutuality of concern, love, companionship, responsibility, household chores, outside interests and sex.

The successful Lesbian relationship cannot be based on society's exaggerated male-female, dominant-passive roles, as depicted in the flood of Lesbian novels on the newsstands which are, for the most part, written by men for heterosexual male consumption. It is the realization that, contrary to cultural myths, all human beings have both feminine and masculine traits and that a person has to find her own identity as a woman and as a partner in this love relationship that makes for success. The fact that Lesbian relationships are generally long-lasting without benefit of religious ceremony or legal sanction is indicative of a strong bond of love and respect which sees the couple through all the obstacles society places in their way.

Fortunately for all women, there is a growing awareness in this country

that woman needs and is more openly demanding an identity for herself as a human being, an identity over and beyond the societal role of housewife and mother. This awareness, coupled with more openness about sexuality and homosexuality, is making it easier now for the young girl, newly aware of her Lesbianism, to cope with the negative sanctions of society. But it is still true that in most areas of our country she has no place to turn for counsel, no one with whom she can talk about her feelings without running the very real risk that the counselor will turn away from her with horror and revulsion.

The Quakers state: "Female homosexuality is free from the legal and, to a large extent, the social sanctions which are so important in the problems of male homosexuals." This is a myth that even the male homosexual has come to believe. It is true that in England there were never any laws pertaining to female homosexuality. But this is not true in the U.S.A. The Lesbian is just as subject to the sanctions of certain laws as the male homosexual; she is just as subject to arrest when she sets foot in a "gay bar;" she is just as subject to blackmail and police harassment. The stigma attached to homosexuality has just as much effect on the Lesbian as she tries to deal with fear and society-imposed guilt in the problem areas of employment, family relationships and religion. Just because the record of arrests is so much smaller is no indication that the Lesbian is relatively free from legal or social sanction. It only means that she is less obvious and less promiscuous. She has done a better job of covering up.

Lesbian problems we have dealt with over the years include the 20-year-old driven to thoughts of suicide because she could not resolve the conflict between her identity as a Lesbian and as a Christian. Or the 40-year-old mother who telephoned Daughters of Bilitis 3,000 miles across the country to break "18 years of silence" after reading a book called The Grapevine by Jess Stearn. Then there was the nurse with a "perfect work record" in a federal hospital who was interrogated by a government investigator, flown from Washington, D.C., at the taxpayers' expense, because someone wrote to a Congressman accusing her of being a Lesbian.

There was the 19-year-old who was trying to find out what homosexuality was all about because she was drummed out of the armed services on a charge she didn't understand. The daughter who receives a monthly allowance from her wealthy family in the Midwest to stay on the coast lest her district attorney father be threatened with a "family skeleton" by his political foes. And the 25-year-old who, after five years of psychiatric therapy, decides she must make the best of herself as herself--a Lesbian.

The most serious problem a Lesbian faces in life is that of self-acceptance. Like everyone else, she has been taught the cultural folklore that a Lesbian is something less than human--a sick, perverted, illegal, immoral animal to be shunned and despised. Needless to say, with the first glimmering of self-knowledge, of awareness that she has Lesbian tendencies, she becomes bogged down in doubt, fear, guilt and hostility.

Some Lesbians claim they have been aware of their Lesbianism since early childhood. Others first become aware during adolescence. Yet there are some women who make this discovery about themselves much later in life--after they

have been married and have had children. Still others, either by choice or lack of opportunity, never admit or act out their Lesbianism.

It isn't easy for a woman to say to herself, let alone anyone else,"I am a Lesbian." But once the words are said, has she really changed? Isn't she still the same person she was--the dear friend, the competent employee, the loving sister? And yet the words become a barrier in her personal and working relationships. To protect her family and her job, she is forced to live a lie, to take on a dual life. No wonder many Lesbians seek out some type of psychiatric or therapeutic help. The miracle is that so many are able to function so well and to contribute so much to society.

The Lesbian is thus a secretive, chameleon creature. She is not easily recognized. The old adage, "It takes one to know one," is not true. Not being distinguishable from other women, she has difficulty meeting others like herself. The "gay bar" is still a meeting place, but there are few such bars which cater to women exclusively because they do not constitute a steady clientele. Besides, a Lesbian, as a woman, has no doubt heard many times the old saw "nice girls don't go into bars," or "no lady would ever go into a bar alone." The Lesbian goes out on the town only occasionally and is more apt to settle down with a partner, to build a home and a lasting relationship, and to develop a small circle of friends--usually both homosexual and heterosexual. Another social outlet for the Lesbian can be homophile organizations throughout the country (if she knows about them), such as Daughters of Bilitis, which has chapters in New York and San Francisco.

The Lesbian, being a woman, comes out of the same cultural pool as do heterosexual women. Therefore, on top of everything else, she may have the same hangups and inhibitions about sex, dress, work, actions, etc., as do her heterosexual sisters. Since women have been taught to be passive, to shun the role of the aggressor, the Lesbian finds herself without the slightest idea of how to approach another woman for a date, for a conversation, for sex. It is a rarity for a heterosexual woman to be approached by a Lesbian unless she has given much indication that such advances are welcome.

Even when the Lesbian accepts her sexual identity and herself as a person, she still faces very real discrimination from society. If she has educated herself to a profession (a role doubly difficult for any woman), she can lose her professional status merely because someone points a finger. This is especially true of teachers, attorneys, doctors, social workers and other professions licensed by the state. But it can also be true for file clerks and secretaries. Very few employers are aware enough to realize that in the Lesbian he has an employee who must work, who will not get married or pregnant, who will devote her energies and capabilities to her job because she will always have to support herself.

As Rabbi Elliot Grafman has stated, "People fear that which they do not understand, and what they fear they despise." It is only through more knowledge and more personal confrontation that the stereotype of the Lesbian can be dispelled. However, to accomplish this feat is to overcome the vicious circle that now envelops the Lesbian who tries to be honest.

If she divulges her identity, she automatically becomes vulnerable. She faces loss of job, family and friends. Yet, until she opens herself to such

possibilities, no one will have the opportunity to come to know and to understand her as the whole person she is.

Through the Council on Religion and the Homosexual, which was formed in San Francisco in 1964 after a three-day retreat attended by clergymen and male and female representatives of the homophile community, such a dialogue began in earnest. Avenues of communication have been opened up not only with the religious community (seminaries and other church groups), but with governmental agencies, the police, business and professional groups, college and high school students. But the task of demythologizing, of education and redefinition of the homosexual is a long and arduous one.

Motive Magazine
March-April 1969

LESBIANS AS WOMEN

At times the alienation of homosexuals seems more complete than that of any other group. We are kept as far away from the two great spheres of human influence--children and government--as possible. Our sexual preference is so far underground that we cannot ordinarily "confess" it to our friends, our bosses, our teachers, our parents, or our preachers, and still hope to earn a living or be welcome in their lives. In short, we are a threat to everybody.

To partially deflect the antagonism we arouse by being a very real disruption in the general order, we have done what every minority group does--taken on the role of the jackass. All the traditional American clowns: the witty drag queen; the grinning black; the giggling Chinese; the giddy and compulsively smiling secretary--are saying in effect: "Hey, boss--you don't have to beat me--I'm not a serious human being."

Now we are beginning to take ourselves seriously, and slowly we're getting our heads together to find out how to radically change our position in this country--how to get other people to take our problems seriously.

But the worst product of antihomosexualism is that it makes us feel cut off from the human race as an ongoing process. We have no stake in our own history , nor in what happens to children (who are always other people's children) nor in what happens to the earth those children will inherit. This makes us involuted, focused-in-on-ourselves, in the sense that we are largely allowed to care only about those things which immediately concern us; how to get along with or hold a new lover, or how much to compromise our behavior or dress in public, or how to get this or that church to forgive us.

Yet what a drastic mistake it would be to suppose that the cause of lesbian and homosexual and women's and Negro rights are all separate, to be fought out in corners somewhere, for unrelated pieces of the living space of this world. Antihomosexualism is a value, one stick in the whole structure of the society. To find out how to fix it, we have to examine the entire house and all its fences; otherwise we are going to be stuck with a bunch of splinters.

The belief that raising one small voice or group of voices, however articulate, against the more and more openly oppressive opposition in this country to a great many people's freedoms--is a selfish, romantic and essentially weak idea. If you feel victimized, there has been a crime committed, and the first problem in solving a crime is to determine who benefits from it. Surely the main body of heterosexuals do not gain from the harassment of homosexuals--unless you believe that slaves "benefit" from having a mule to kick.

Racism and the subjugation of women hurt me as deeply and as concretely as antilesbianism--I simply do not feel them so directly--because I am white and because as a lesbian I avoid having to deal with male chauvinism in my

house. But my wages and my education and the kind of work I am allowed to do, as well as the type of clothing I can wear while I'm doing it, are all determined by the fact that I am a woman--not because I am a lesbian.

No lesbian, performing what she knows in her soul are meaningless tasks in somebody else's office, hemmed in by paranoia and anxiety over losing her job or her friends, can ever hope to deal with antihomosexuality by herself, or even with all the homophile groups to back her up. Only when she is a part of an enormous group of strong and determined people--all of whom are struggling to break out of their restricted lives--can she be guaranteed the kind of emotional and economic support it takes to really change her life, or mine, or anybody's.

As homosexuals we need not only to change heterosexual attitudes toward us, but also to try to understand the basis for those attitudes. How is it that people are fenced off so harshly from each other, and in such narrow stalls we can hardly see over the walls, spending half our time kicking out blindly at each other in supposedly irrational hatred...

In its present condition, our society depends on making most of its people perform drab work under rigidly boring circumstances. Our government depends on people to fight and pay for wars the people do not actively believe in, and many actively oppose. Our rulers depend on our money being spent for many products we would never volunteer it for: like the stockings, girdles and crippling shoes which have become "necessities" for most women's jobs. And they depend on our tax money, which is often spent for such "top secret" purposes we cannot even find out whether it went for murder, mayhem, or moon landings.

To keep us running in those circles we must be more closely spurred, corralled and hogtied than we realize. Binding people's minds up in endless personal problems and mazes of individual guilt are methods of control, which act very effectively to keep us from thinking about anything else, and seem to be one of the main functions of modern psychology. The psychiatrist who spends his entire life finding reasons to categorize homosexuals as psychotic, while thousands of people go genuinely mad and get no treatment, is helping to keep us in line, not helping to keep us sane.

Over and over we are encouraged to believe that the conditions of our lives are really our own doing. Yet the use and misuse of natural resources are so removed from our hands that we are actually forced to hurt and pollute: the housewife does not produce or sell the chemicals in her box of soap that make the suds that kill the fish that nobody, not even the birds can eat. And the secretary who must rampantly waste paper making 18 copies of an unread office memo has no idea what the forest looked like when the loggers left, or whether it will ever be replanted. In the face of the companies who litter up our country on a truly enormous scale, little signs on the bus telling us where to stick our candy wrappers are the height of insult.

But our society has many more devices for controlling and restricting our lives and minds besides personal guilt. Tying people up in tiny mortgaged

families and roping them in with multiple appliances and expensive individual transportation--until they are so far in debt they can never escape--is one way. Track systems in the schools which channel kids into specific work or welfare ruts, and little girls especially into clerical or "helpmate" roles, from the time they are six years old, is another. Marriage, in its present form, functions mainly as a life-long labor and child support contract signed by heterosexual men. And women, kept as they are in secondary work positions, underpaid or unpaid, are completely dependent on that contract to provide for them, as well as being almost their only hope or moving up in the world.

But the best method of control used is also the best way to catch a horse--cut him off from the herd. We are cut into all sorts of groups, by race, by sex, by sex preference, by class, by education, and even by age groups, which can then be pitted against each other; and we all lose by it.

Flagrant (honest) homosexuals are contained by being branded and herded into special bars or areas of the city which are constantly watched and always vulnerable to raids by political vice squads, so the general public can be told the lie that its police force is protecting them from "vice". Antihomosexualism helps to keep people distracted from their real problems, and nobody uses that distraction more effectively than mayors and police chiefs who "clean up" a city's red light and gay districts before election time.

For the secret homosexual, popular magazine culture teaches that homosexuals are lonely, tormented, narcissistic souls. This is another form of containment--you can be homosexual, but only if you are miserable, and your life such a sham no one else would want to follow you out of grace.

All of us have heard the business world's excuse for not hiring us: we are "unstable". What they mean is that they have more trouble forcing us to work at a job or live in an area that we do not like. People with children are more vulnerable and therefore "stable": that is, they can more easily be stabled, and saddled, and broken to the bit.

Yet we ourselves accept as truth the self-serving judgements handed down by business executives, and cannot take advantage of our mobility and relative freedom. We let ourselves be used as bogeymen to frighten the heterosexuals into "acting right". Just as white supremacy is used as a compensation for badly paid white workers, so antihomosexualism is used as a compensation for heterosexuals. A man may have little else in his life but at least he has his "manhood"; he can pretend to be a stallion just so long as he has a wife to be superior to.

Conversely, a woman may not have any power of her own but at least she can live through her children, and be protected by her man--mainly from violence. (It's the cleverest protection racket going; if all the men vanished overnight, how many women would be afraid to walk the streets?) Many women shy away from women's liberation groups because their men tell them they will be consorting with lesbians. If a woman tries to think for herself, she must be a lesbian--a bad nigger.

Lesbians are "loose women" in a very real sense--we are running around like mavericks, without the legal and economic bonds of marriage, or the smothering and basically unpaid labor of individual childrearing, to tie us to a tightly defined life style. So we must be restrained, or else we might encourage other women to be independent; we might become too educated or too political; we might begin making demands which the present system cannot grant--such as the right to have a hand in raising or teaching or adopting children, or of equal pay for women. Therefore, we are controlled by systematic legal and individual repression. Colleges and managers and landlords can kick us into the street, police can kick us into the can, and street boys can kick us in the can.

But if lesbians are mavericks under control, women in general have been hobbled even more severly. For years women have been pushed into buying more and more cosmetics and soap and wasteful wrappings for silly products--trying desperately to live up to the Miss America image; and pushed into the truly vicious cycle of obsession with fatty foods, coupled with obsession for skinny bodies. Yet women are never allowed to think about, much less manage, the production or distribution of food, or anything else for that matter. Women have only recently begun to have some power over the use of their own bodies, and even in those places where therapeutic abortion is legal, men are still making the final decisions about the operation, as well as performing it. Women are, however, beginning to group together to put a name to their common problems, and struggling to find what actions would help solve them.

As homosexuals we must burst through our own alienation and jump the fences set up in our own minds and in other people's minds about who we are and whether or not we matter to the world. Every time we sit quietly while our bars are raided; every time we allow a fellow homosexual to be busted or fired, we confirm our straight neighbors' image of us as inferior and worthy of punishment. Every time we accept the word "queer", even in a joke, we confirm our own image of ourselves as different, as other-than-human.

Yet it is our sameness with other people which is the basis for our strength, and the fact that we have many of the same problems as they do. By restricting ourselves to fighting only for homosexual rights, we not only cut down the chances for exciting exchanges with people who could open us up to new ideas and techniques, to say nothing of physically supporting us in our battles; we also deny them information we have gotten from our unique experiences. We have insights which could be invaluable to any group of minds attempting to construct a new model for a new, less wasteful, more beautiful society.

Our natural allies are all the pretty little horses; and we must seek them out and define ourselves to them in our terms, and if the men cannot understand, we must go to the women: the students on campus fighting the track system and the perpetuation of trapped people helplessly ruining their own earth; the street people in Berkeley, who raised the issue of the misuse of land; and the militant black and brown and poor white groups around the country; as well as the homophile movement.

As homosexuals we are faced not only with the problem of how to change heterosexual attitudes toward us, but also with understanding the basis for those attitudes. If we feel victimized, there has been a crime committed, and the first problem in solving a crime is to determine who benefits from it. If heterosexuals hated us just for the hell of it, massive love potions would be the answer. But if they are taught to hate us in order to protect the nuclear family structure--which also cuts people off from each other, and forces them to buy more products than, say, communal living would; or if they are taught to hate us because it puts a sharper edge to job competition; or it they are taught to hate us because we function as a social control and scapegoat that ultimately works to keep the money and power and resources of this country in the hands of only a very few people--then we have to be doubly armed against that hatred, and ready to fight it at many different levels.

* * * * * * * * *

My last dramatic encounter with rampant antilesbianism occurred three years ago, when, after I had parked my motorcycle at a hamburger stand, a drunk-young-man who did not like the way I looked, came up to me and called me a queer; and when I failed to respond, he broke my nose.

The threat of that kind of physical assault had hung over me for years. As a young lesbian, short-haired and defensive, I slouched through many rainy and half-drunk city streets trying to figure out who I was. At that time, every catcall or muffled insult sounded like the prelude to a gang-beating--my world was full of angry young men on street corners. And late at night I sometimes fantasized armies of heavily armed lesbians, ready to help me beat them back in black boot military fashion.

So when, finally, the real fist from the real drunk-young-man's anger hit my face, it wasn't as though I had never prepared for it. But during the period between those violent fantasies and the actual punch, I had changed my hair style and appearance to the point of not being readily recognizable as a lesbian. Essentially I looked like any other woman, except that I drove a bike. The crazy guy was completely out of date--I'd been all set up for him eight years before that, so why did he wait until I'd gotten almost "respectable"?

Now, in retrospect, I believe he was not so much punching out a lesbian, as he was punching out a woman who was carrying a motorcycle helmet. He didn't give a damn about my choice of sexual partners, or whether I did "nasty" things in bed; what upset him was my intrusion into two of his manly territories: machinery and action.

I had antagonized him, not as a pervert, but as a somewhat liberated woman--capable of acting and thinking on my own--and that's what he'd been taught to react violently against.

The straight women involved in the women's liberation movement are beginning to face various degrees of this same blatant chauvinism from men, the hostility that lesbians have known about for years. They also are

beginning to understand the enormous isolation that women (all women) are subjected to: isolation from each other because they have to compete for men's attention (whether he's a husband or a boss) isolation from activity (men do things while women sit and watch) isolation from decisions (women are told they are stupid and undependable) and isolation from knowledge (men gladly tell other men how the plumbing or the car work, and what keeps a suspended bridge suspended).

The differences between what women are allowed to know and what men are expected to know are so great you would think the two sexes were raised on different sides of the globe. A woman is considered socially and emotionally "mature" when she is sixteen because she has already learned everything she is supposed to know or really needs to know, for the rest of her life. No wonder lesbians have tried to say "Hell, no!" to that role.

But the lesbian solution to a male dominated society has traditionally been to hide, or "pass"--to pair off with a lover (if she's lucky) and to surround herself with a few safe friends, and let it go at that. This double life is so agonizingly schizophrenic and lonely it's a wonder we didn't all go mad long ago.

Straight women, as they begin to unravel the extent to which women are cheated and wasted in this society, are finding a better solution--the exact opposite of isolation. By banding together in small groups, they find they can develop strong supportive voices for themselves and each other, to help confront and change male attitudes toward them.

In this process, one of the problems they are having to think about is the fact that many men accuse them of being lesbians, just for taking part in a women's liberation movement, and for starting to think and act for themselves.

If ever there was a chance for a group of lesbians to talk openly, to teach straight women and to learn from them, and to begin to break down some of the myths about us, it's surely in these women's groups.

Because the women's liberation movement is still unstructured and democratic, and so loosely formed, in fact, that no one even knows how many groups there are, it is possible to be completely open and still anonymous. Members meet once a week and rarely see each other the rest of the time. Yet the groups are so small it's easy for the women to relax and get to know each other quickly.

It's been a long time coming, but if a change is going to come, now is when to begin it. My present fantasies are of an army of lesbians, heavily armed with information and support from each other, launching a real attack against male chauvinism and antihomosexualism, by exchanging education and moral support with heterosexual women. Let's get to it.

Gay Women's Liberation
November 1969

Lesbianism is one road to freedom--freedom from oppression by men.

To see lesbianism in this context--as a mode of living neither better nor worse than others, as one which offers its own opportunities--one must abandon the notion that deviance from the norm arises from personal illness.

It is generally accepted that America is a "sick society". There is an inevitable corollary to this statement, which has not been generally accepted: that people within our society are all crippled by virtue of being forced to conform to certain norms. (Those who conform most easily can be seen as either the most healthy, because adaptable, or most sick because least spirited.) The black is struggling to free himself not only from white oppression, but from the sickness of self-contempt and the sick roles he has been forced to play. Women are struggling to liberate their minds from sick sexual roles. It is clear that the self-abasing, suffering, shuffling black is not someone with a personal neurosis, but society's victim--and someone who has been forced to learn certain techniques for survival. Few people understand that the same is true of the self-abnegating passive housewife. Fewer understand this truth about the homosexual.

These techniques of survival help us meet certain needs, at the expense of others.

For women, as for other groups, there are several American norms. All of them have their rewards--and their penalties. The nice girl next door, virginal until her marriage--the Miss America type--is rewarded with community respect and respectability. She loses her individuality and her freedom to become a toothpaste smile and a chastity belt. The career woman gains independence and a larger margin of freedom--if she is willing to work twice as hard as a man for less pay, and if she can cope with emotional strains similar to those that beset the black intellectual surrounded by white colleagues. The starlet, call-girl, or bunny whose source of income is directly related to her image as a sex-object, gains some financial independence and freedom from housework. She doesn't have to work as hard as the career woman, but she pays through psychological degredation as a sex object, and through the insecurity of knowing that her career--based on youthful good looks--is short-lived.

The lesbian, through her ability to obtain love and sexual satisfaction from other women, is freed of dependence on men for love, sex and money. She does not have to do menial chores for them (at least at home), nor cater to their egos, nor submit to hasty and inept sexual encounters. She is freed from fear of unwanted pregnancy and the pains of childbirth, and from the drudgery of child raising.

On the other hand, she pays three penalties. The rewards of child raising are denied her. This is a great loss for some women, but not for others. Few women abandon their children, as compared with the multitudes of men who abandon both wives and children. Few men take much interest in the process of child raising. One suspects that it might not be much fun for the average person, and so the men leave it to the women.

The lesbian must compete with men in the job market, facing the same job and salary discrimination as her straight sister. On the other hand, she has more of a chance of success since her career is not interrupted by childbirth.

Finally, she faces the most severe contempt and ridicule that society can heap on a woman.

A year ago, when Women's Liberation picketed the 1968 Miss America pageant, the most terrible epithet heaped on our straight sisters was

"lesbian". The sisters faced a hostile audience who called them "commies", "tramps","bathless", etc., and they faced these labels with equanimity; but they broke into tears when they were called lesbians. When a woman showed up at a feminist meeting and announced that she was a lesbian, many women avoided her. Others told her to keep her mouth shut, for fear that she would endanger the cause. They felt that men could be persuaded to accept some measure of equality for women--as long as these women would parade their devotion to heterosexuality and motherhood.

A woman who is totally independent of men--who obtains love, sex and self-esteem from other women--is a terrible threat to male supremacy. She doesn't need them, and therefore they have very little power over her.

I have met many, many feminists who were not lesbians--but I have never met a lesbian who was not a feminist. Straight women by the millions have been sold the belief that they must subordinate themselves to men, accept less pay for equal work, and do all the shit work around the house. I have met straight women who would die to preserve their chains. I have never met a lesbian who believed that she was innately less rational or capable than a man; who swallowed one word of the "woman's role" horse-shit.

Lesbians, because they are not afraid of being abandoned by men, are less reluctant to express hostility towards the male class--the oppressors of women. Hostility towards your oppressor is healthy--but the guardians of modern morality, the psychiatrists, have interpreted this hostility as an illness, and they say this illness causes and is lesbianism.

If hostility to men causes lesbianism, then it seems to me that in a male-dominated society, lesbianism is a sign of mental health.

The psychiatrists have also forgotten that lesbianism involves love between women. Isn't love between equals healthier than sucking up to an oppressor? And when they claim we aren't capable of loving men, even if we want to--I ask you, straight man, are you capable of loving another man so deeply that you aren't afraid of his body or afraid to put your body in his hands? Are you really capable of loving women, or is your sexuality just another expression of your hostility? Is it an act of love or sexual conquest? An act of sexual imperialism?

I do not mean to condemn all males. I have found some beautiful, loving men among the revolutionaries, among the hippies, and the male homosexuals. But the average man--including the average student male redical--wants a passive sex-object cum domestic cum baby nurse to clean up after him while he does all the fun things and bosses her around--while he plays either bigshot executive or Che Guevara--and he is my oppressor and my enemy.

Society has taught most lesbians to believe that they are sick and has taught most straight women to despise and fear the lesbian as a perverted, diseased creature. It has fostered the myth that lesbians are ugly and turn to each other because they can't get that prize, that prince, a male! In this age of the new "sexual revolution", another myth has been fostered--the beautiful lesbians who play games with each other on the screen for the titillation of heterosexual males. They are not seen as serious people in love--but as performers in the "let's try a new perversion" game.

Freud founded the myth of penis envy, and men have asked me, "But what can two women do together?" As though a penis were the sine qua non of sexual pleasure! Man, we can do without it, and keep it going longer, too!

Women are afraid to be without a man's protection--because other men will assault them on the streets. And this is no accident, not an aberration

performed by a few lunatics. Assaults on women are no more an accident than are lynchings of blacks in Mississippi. Men have oppressed us, and like most oppressors, they hate the oppressed and fear their wrath. Watch a white man walking in Harlem and you will see what I mean. Look at the face of a man who has accidently wandered into a lesbian bar.

Men fear lesbians because they are less dependent, and because their hostility is less controlled.

Straight women fear lesbians because of the lesbian inside them, because we represent an alternative. They fear us for the same reason that uptight middle class people fear hip people. They are angry at us because we have a way out that they are afraid to take.

And what happens to the lesbian under this pressure? Many of my sisters, confused by the barrage of anti-gay propaganda, have spent years begging to be allowed to live. They have come begging because they believed they were psychic cripples, and that other people were healthy and had the moral right to judge them. Many have lived in silence, burying themselves in their careers, like name-changing Jews, and blacks who passed for white. Many have retreated into an apolitical domesticity, concerning themselves only with the attempts to destroy love and replace it with consumer goods--flowers, mouthwashes, diamond rings, automobiles--and which attempts to completely destroy any form of love outside the monogamous marriage.

This, by the way, is an important point for all kinds of revolutionaries. If you love your brother, you are less willing to stand by and watch him get crushed under the relentless pressure of the rat race, of the doctor bills and the furniture bills. If you love your brother, you won't try to swindle him. Restricting love to the immediate family group isolated each family from the community--each ethnic group from the others--and makes all these isolated frightened people more willing to settle for fancy furniture on the installment plan, for grudgingly bestowed respectability, because they can't get the real thing, real love.

To return to lesbianism--because lesbianism has become such a vile epithet, we have been afraid to fight openly. We can lose our jobs--we have fewer civil rights than any other minority group. Because we have few family ties and no children, for the most part, we have been active in many causes--but always in secret, because our name contaminates any cause we work for.

To the radical lesbian, I say that we can no longer afford to fight for everyone else's cause while ignoring our own. Ours is a life style born out of a sick society--so is everyone else's. Our kind of love is as valid as anyone else's. The revolution must be fought for us too, as well as black, Indians, welfare mothers, grape pickers, SDS people, Puerto Ricans, or mine workers. We must have a revolution for human rights.

Maybe after the revolution, people will be able to love each other regardless of skin color, ethnic origin, occupation, or type of genitals. But if it's going to happen, it will only happen because we make it--starting right now.

Martha Shelley
Come Out! November 1969

LESBIANS AS BOGEYWOMEN

Any form of behavior that doesn't fit into the image that television and Reader's Digest believe the American people should be like, is usually categorized as either subnatural or supernatural.

The myths about homosexuals fall into both categories, depending on how close it is to being you.

Lesbians are subnatural when they live next door and supernatural when they live in Paris and write books.

Most people's ideas about lesbianism come from pornographic films and magazines, all of which are produced for and by men. It's a very strange thing to find your existence defined as a part of somebody's pornographic fantasy library - sex episode #93.

One night at my regular women's liberation group meeting, one of the women said, "You know, the first night you told us you were a lesbian, I sat in terror for the rest of the meeting, waiting for you to attack me or something."

Men who are obsessed with sex are convinced that lesbians are obsessed with sex. Actually, like any other woman, lesbians are obsessed with love and fidelity.

They're also strongly interested in independence and in having a lifework to do, but other than that, lesbians are not extra ordinary.

I once met a lesbian who had built her own house, with her own hands, to her own specifications, (She was about 4' 11" tall.) But I have no doubt that any woman who wanted to build a house, could--except she probably married an architect or a carpenter instead.

Homosexuality and other "bizarre" characteristics are associated with art and artiness partly so artists can be considered that much more supernatural. This keeps people in general from considering themselves as artists; they're not kooky enough. If you cant chop off your ear, you cant paint.

Gertrude Stein didnt write well because she was a lesbian: she wrote because she wanted to, and she had a disciplined, sensitive mind, and she didnt have to work in a dime-store eight hours a day.

The women in history who were the less fortunate counterparts of Gertrude Stein, unable to retire on papa's money, cut off their hair and joined the merchant marine; or sneaked out west for a life of adventure as cowboys. Some were never discovered until the local mortician...all astonished...came running out of the funeral parlor..."My God, guess what I just found out about old Harry Willits..."
And as a matter of fact, old Harry may never have thought about loving another woman in her life, but she still goes down in history as a lesbian. Every woman who steps out of line gets assigned a sexual definition---lesbian, whore, nymphomaniac, castrator, adultress...

Lesbians who dress and act in a particular manner, do so as a means of mutual recognition--that's how they know who is eligible to fall in love with, since you're not allowed to just ask.

If anybody was allowed to fall in love with <u>anybody</u>, the word "homo-sexual" wouldnt be needed; it's used now only to set people off in separate categories, artificially, so they'll know who to be afraid of---each other.

Bogeymen and bogeywomen function to keep people off the streets, and home watching television and reading Reader's Digest.

Lesbianism isnt something you <u>are</u>...
it's something you <u>do</u>...
Specifically, it's the love you give somebody who happens, also, to be female.

Gay Women's Liberation
January 1970

COITUS INTERRUPTUS

Sex is used to sell everything in our country...magazines, cars art, and RAT. If you packaged shit, called it Fabulous Feces and utilized a buxom woman in the advertising campaign, it would sell. All this rampant commercial sexuality is incredibly destructive. Damned if I want our bodies to sell the leprous products of our great society. Damned if I want my body to send a movement male on his butch ego trip. It's one thing if plastic people relate to each other as automatic genitalia but it's a whole other scene if we radicals and revolutionaries are a distorted version of the mass culture. Sexuality is the same whether you are a Maoist, anarchist or reconditioned Goldwaterite. The male seeks to conquer through sex while the female seeks to communicate. Put the two together and you breed hate...neither can break through the preconceived role pattern in the other. If each accepts their sexual role, even in hip terms, a cold war develops.

But despite mutual discontent with the opposite sex the male still comes out on "top". His ego can swell up like a bloated tick, gorged on his various conquests. He can parade in front of other males (whether at IBM or the SDS office) holding his much used prick as proof of his manhood, the locus of his identity as a male. Whoever heard of abortion mentioned in these circumstances? Notice that this parading with the typical ignorance of consequence is done for the benefit of other males.

This arid homosexuality which uses the heterosexual act as the basis for its male supremacist structure is Amerika's answer to the carnage of the Coliseum--we do it in bed spiritually instead of in the arena bodily.

To define yourself by your genitals or by a sexual act (heterosexuality, homosexuality) is to fall into the trap our sexist society has set for you. It will take men much longer to see this, to discover that sexism is political, than it will for women. Aside from the already mentioned reason that sexism is in his favor, a man can ignore sexism because his entire identity does not depend on sexual function. The boasting of conquest is demanded but he can also expect a life outside of sex--he can be a senator, a pig or big-time leader. Women are defined by sexual function alone...in or out of the movement. The usual insensitive male response to Women's Liberation is, "All those chicks need is a good lay." We have no other identity in society or in revolutionary counter-society. Our fulfillment is still to mysteriously come via the erect penis.

For a woman to accept this definition of herself is to accept spiritual lobotomy, self amputated before it can grow. For a woman, especially in the Woman's Movement---to vocally assert her heterosexuality is to emphasize her "goodness" by her sexual activity with men. That old sexist brainwashing runs deep even into the consciousness of the most ardent feminist who will quickly tell you she loves sleeping with men. In fact, the worst thing you can call a woman in our society (again, this also applies to counter-society) --is a lesbian. Women are so male

identified that they quake at the mention of this three-syllable word. The lesbian is, of course, the woman who has no need of men. When you think about it, what is so terrible two women loving each other? To the insecure male, this is the supreme offense, the most outrageous blasphemy comitted against the sacred scrotum.

After all, just what would happen if we all wound up loving each other. Good things for us, but it would mean each man would lose his personal "nigger"...a real and great loss if you are a man.

Our sexist culture destroys everyone, male and female. It prevents men from really loving anything other than themselves and what brings them pleasure (the female) and it prevents women from the exercise of self. At the root of this sexist culture is intense woman hatred and intense hatred of sexual activity. Our American emphasis on sex is a sad illustration of how false sex is and how commercial. Part of this hatred probably springs from male jealousy over female life-giving functions. Maybe some of it is due to the fact that we have more sexual staying power, especially as we mature. I can't pretend to know where it all comes from but I do know it is there. The male experience of sex is diametrically opposed to the female experience. All of our literature, (male literature, they won't publish ours yet) from Melville to Mailer shows us this inability to enjoy sex as communication, as joy. It is either evil or an ego trip.

In line with this, the traditional male explanation for lesbianism is a patronizing use of our deepest emotions to explain their needs and fears. Men always explain lesbianism as a woman turning to another woman because she can't get a man or because she has been treated badly by men. They can't seem to cope with the fact that it is a positive response to another human being. To love another woman is an acceptance of sex which is a severe violation of the male culture (sex as exploitation) and therefore carries severe penalites. To really love another human being. To really love another woman is to communicate (at its best) and even at its worst (erotic exercise) the idea of conquest is absurd. But the problem is more varied than that. Women have been taught to abdicate the power of our bodies, both physically in athletics and self-defense and sexually. To sleep with another woman is to confront the beauty and power of your own body as well as hers. You confront the experience of your sexual self knowledge. You also confront another human being without the protective device of role. This may be too painful for most women as many have been so brutalized by heterosexual role play that they cannot begin to comprehend this real power. It is an overwhelming experience. I vulgarize it when I call it a freedom high. No wonder there is such resistance to lesbianism.

For a man to engage in a homosexual act is not the assertion of self and woman hood that it can be for a woman. It may even be a negation of self. For a man in America to love another man and express that love physically is to lose cock privilege--to become a woman in the eyes of that society (again, counter-society also) and is the only male who has some idea of what it is like to be despised as a woman. Our culture is so sexist, so narrow minded, so frightened that it can only function in terms

of roles. These roles are simplified: Male=power and dominance; female= nurturance and passivity. There is no such thing as human.

The man who wants to sleep with another man has to be a woman--it's the only way mini-minds can handle him. Those men who do manage to break through their fear of confronting their sexual experience and sleeping with another man usually find themselves torn as to who they are. It is a negation of self for many. They have been so brainwashed by sexist culture that they give us the phenomenon of male homosexual promiscuity or the sadist/masochist bars, with the "masters" and "slaves"--the logic of our sexist culture carried to its ultimate end. Most male homosexuals I know are desperately clinging to the externals of cock privilege while secretly fearing they aren't really men. One of the ironies that clearly demonstrates this exists within some of the political homosexual groups--they are often male supremacist. The lesbians are not taken seriously. The more they look like traditional female sex objects, the more accepted they are.

What a pitiable comment on our generation, the males in our society closest to renouncing cock privilege, closest to breaking out of role, retreat to more restrictive roles and still cannot deal with the reality of independent womanhood, of the self-directed, non-male identified woman. She is as much of a threat to him as to his straight brother. There are a few courageous women fighting this one out with these men, but once again women's energies are being wasted trying to educate males. Men must educate themselves, Mommy or Queen Chick isn't going to nurture anymore.

And so our sexist culture humps on its exhausted way with the Sexual Ku Klux Klan burning out the beauty in all of us. I do believe women are breaking out of and through to each other in fighting sexism. I do believe this will force the culture to re-examine itself and the backlash will be enormous. This kind of re-examination has to be done in the gut and that means concrete pain. It is a lot easier for men and male-identified women to avoid that pain by hurting the people who are jeopardizing their world axis. Our very lives force people to ask those questions of themselves.

I wish I could say something encouraging. I wish I could say that the irrational aspects of our beings (color, sex) will fade away in the future. I wish I could say we'd forget black and white and male and female and concentrate on being human, on being beautiful, on being alive. I wish I could say that two Fridays ago I didn't receive a phone call from a male that said, "You're Rita Mae Brown, aren't you?" "Yes," I answered. "I hear you don't like men, you're a dyke, a cunt lapper and I've put a bomb under your stairway." Click. I wish I could say that it didn't hurt.

Rita Mae Brown
RAT February 6, 1970

SOMETHING IT MEANS TO BE A LESBIAN

At some point in your life being a Lesbian means you will question your womanhood. Our society offers only strictly defined image roles for men and women. These image roles are constantly reinforced for us through our educational system and Madison Avenue advertising. We are lead to believe that all will be well when we become one part of the "ideal couple" and continue in the nuclear-family consuming game. When such a life style is presented as the ideal, we need not wonder why persons (Lesbians included!) have some identity difficulties.

The Lesbian sees several choices. She may adjust to a life of schizophrenia in order to keep secret the "unnatural" inner world she loves in. She may select one of many niches offered "old maids"; school teacher, librarian, secretary or Avon saleslady. She may also play the "straight" role of a married life to a man and have several children to further insure her "straightness." Inwardly, she can fantasize in a Lesbian dream world (everyone knows what keen imaginations homosexuals have!) Many women do survive this "existence" and never actualize a full love relationship. Not until a valid relationship with another woman begins do many Lesbians discover what it means to be a total individual.

Other Lesbians become tired of making up stories about long, lost "boyfriends" and decide to actively seek out other Lesbians. How does a woman go about doing this? She usually falls into role-playing based on those same "straight" image roles she was brought up with. If a woman has not yet become aware of the liberation movement through Gay Women's Liberation, she is left with the only alternative society will provide - the "Bar Ghetto." The bar culture often merely reshapes the role-playing of the dominant colture. Now the Lesbian must fit into a role in order to relate to other women. She must be Butch or Femme. Because we are conditioned for definite man or woman roles, many Lesbians begin to question where they are as women. After all, only men are supposed to turn on to women. If you love women and desire their company, you must have some hormone imbalance - actually you should have been born a male, right? (Remember how much of a "tom boy" you were). Therefore, the logical solution to your identity crisis is to cut your hair short, wear T-shirts (with a pocket to keep your cigarettes in), flatten your chest, and wear tight Levis and leather boots. There's a Butch any Femme would be proud of!

Hopefully, we as Lesbians can become "liberated" to the self and realize that we have been co-opted into role-playing. Outward dress does not make the woman, but it may conceal a woman from herself. A woman doesn't want to take a pseudo-male image or to fall in love with a "fake" woman. A Lesbian is a woman and she needs to turn to other women for affection, respect, and communication. She wants the freedom to "be" in her womanhood.

If you are now into heavy role-playing, examine it. Think about the whys of it and how you got there. Was it by free choice, or are you in

an ersatz underworld where roles are set up to keep women from experiencing each other as women? If you really dig being a stomping Dyke as an extension of womanhood, why don't you turn on to some other Dykes? Is that idea repulsive to you? If being a "super femme" is real to you, why do you generally turn off to other Femmes? Do you view them as competitors?

It is still difficult for any part of society to "accept" a real woman being overtly in love with another real woman. Even the homosexual ghetto must stereotype. Human beings are so programmed that they often put down inner-feelings if these conflict with carefully-taught prejudices. There is much "liberation" to be done. Role-playing must be eliminated. Human beings must experience each other as individuals not as labelled sexualities.

Gay Women's Liberation, Berkeley
December 1969

GAY EXPERIENCES - THE SISTERS SPEAK OUT

HIGH SCHOOL

Cultivating homosexual tendencies in high school was too easy. You don't have to know that you are going to be a lesbian when you first start to dig being with a girlfriend more than anybody in the world . . anyway, I didn't.

Have you ever noticed that when you don't know what you're doing you do more? Naivete was my downfall for sure. I used to be casual about actions that society stereotypes as blatantly gay. Generally, high school was one really good friend after another with whom I had some very physical moments. That's what I mean about being naive. Neither one of us knew what we were classifying ourselves as by being as affectionate as we felt.

After three really close friends and myself had gone through a time in our respective relationships of this physicallity, I recognized a pattern in my friendships. My friends, apparently not confiding in one another, only saw the uniqueness of the experience for themselves.

I immediately took on the burden of guilt. LIFE AND LOVE FOR TEENAGERS prescribed psychiatric counselling though they also stated that prognosis for cure was very low. Let's make a point of rewriting the chapter on homosexuality after the Revolution. It made me feel hopelessly dirty and sick. I became suspicous of any uncontrollable emotions and motives my strange new self might have.

It was at that time, too, that I became very inhibited about being touchy with female people--for fear of spreading my disease maybe. No one thought anything of feet or hands or heads touching at slumber parties--no one but me. I even stopped playing basketball because I was afraid if they saw my body in the shower room they would somehow figure out what immoral disease I carried.

I was really afraid. What had gone wrong with me? Was there anything wrong, or was it just coincidence until then? I tried not to dwell on it. There were lots of girls who were willing to be my friends, that's why cultivating this habit was so easy. I was just conscious of my 'tendencies' when we were in conducive situations; which was too often!

By my last year in high school, having experienced intense loving relationships with females and the expected but superficial flirtatiousness with males plus their cold, meaningless sex, I began to recognize how unjust society is in declaring normalcy to mean heterosexuality for all. I resented the double standard which I became aware of gradually through closer examination of my guilt.

I concluded, and still believe, that 1) no person has a right or obligation to judge another's morals and behavior; 2) no group of people has a right to force its beliefs on others, penalizing rejection of these values with humiliating and severly demoralizing labels and their consequences; 3) this society does not encourage female people to develop to their greatest potential.

After forming these opinions, I was off on a more serious trend of relationships - the real kind. I no longer feel guilty - I'm angry. After sneaking, hiding, lying, running away, awkward encounters with friends and parents I'm convinced I'm not acting more irrationally than they make me act or they are acting themselves.

ACCEPTANCE

I've briefly asked myself what being gay has in common with the fight for Women's Liberation. At times I've felt that my being a member of WLF may even be hurting the group because some women might hesitate to join if they think that the group is just a bunch of "man-haters". But I decided that there was a common bond and have equated the two (WLF and being gay) on the basis of respect. As long as I'm a woman, i.e., human being, I deserve a certain amount of respect more or less dependent upon if I'm personally worthy and have earned it. Yet, as soon as I say I'm homosexual, in some eyes I immediately become a low animal if not hated, at least pitied. Therefore, as long as I'm a woman and am being cheated of my right for respect, my plight, even though perhaps in a different form, cannot be separated from the oppression and degradation of all women.

This is an example of one of the situations that occur in the life of a homosexual. One weekend there was to be a small reunion with two of my old college friends, one of whom had known me for years. The other friend couldn't make it that weekend but we two made the best of it, talking over old times like a couple of old biddy gossips.

Since my love life really couldn't be talked about as I never told her about my being gay, I turned the conversation to who she was dating. She was happy to go into great detail, and I was relieved as this took the burden of the conversation off of me. Then she proceeded to tell me about some weirdo who was window peeking in her apartment and another one who was making obscene phone calls; both of which I could understand her being upset about. Through this part of our conversation she used the word "pervert" about 30 times (no exaggeration). Although not once did she use it in relation to female homosexuals, each time she said it I cringed. I wondered if she would call me "pervert" if she knew how I felt about women. Finally in the middle of her conversation I stopped her. I said, "Look, I'm going to tell you something, but I want you to remember while I'm telling you this that I'm the same person you've always known and will be afterwards--I'm homosexual."

She never even blinked. She started talking in short, fast bursts. "Oh really? I'd have never guessed it." Then I could see a change coming over her face as it started sinking in and she said, "If you lay one hand on me I'll knock you silly." Seeing as I hadn't even moved except for my eyes watching her hands and face, the menacing tone of her voice and the fear in her eyes would have been ludicrous if not for the fact that a minute ago this was a smiling chatty friend of mine.

I assured her that I wouldn't touch her and tried to explain that because I was homosexual didn't mean that I went around attacking other women but that I preferred the company of women and when it happened that two of us liked the same things, could talk, maybe even enjoyed arguing with each other, just like heterosexual couples - then - and only then- could there be "sex". I'll have to grant her this, she tried her best to understand. Once she realized that I wasn't going to rape her she started questioning me about how I felt, and why I was what I was, etc.

It became apparent though, that she didn't understand. Some friends that I had asked to join us for dinner called to say they would be out shortly, and when I mentioned their names, Bobbie and Joe, she very seriously informed me that if they were two girls she was leaving. When a man and a woman showed up she was visibly relieved.

That night she slept in my bed and I slept on the couch knowing that she would sleep fitfully, listening for my step.

In the morning as she was preparing to leave she blurted out the speech she had memorized for my benefit, "If you never mention this again, I won't, and we can still be friends." I assured her that was fine with me and that I would never mention it again. She told me that she would write in about two weeks and plan when I could come and visit at her house . . . Months have passed without the word that I knew would not come.

BUTCH TO WOMAN

As a very special person once said to me, "What is this butch business anyway?"

A butch is a gay woman who takes a more dominant role in a lesbian affair. She usually will be wearing men's clothes...sometimes right down to men's shorts. You'll recognize her because she appears to be a woman trying to be a man. She'll sometimes be in competition with men over women. I know because I was a butch. I cut my hair short and combed it as much like a man's haircut as I could. I walked bowlegged--guess it made me feel tough. I was ready to defend at any moment, sometimes almost looking for a fight just to prove that I was a big butch even though I was scared to death.

I wanted to be a stud--in other words I wanted to please many women, but most of all I wanted one woman to love, support and defend. Of course she had to meet certain qualifications. She had to be tiny, good looking and blonde. She had to be able to cook, wash, iron, and keep house--also handle financial affairs--I hate that! Most of all she had to want only me, jump at my slightest command, and never look at another butch, liable to severe punishment.

I wasted more smiles at fems and spent more money buying drinks and paying for motel rooms--all for fems that didn't want to settle down, or at least not with me.

After all the bad things in life that could descend on a person had descended upon me, some friends of mine introduced me to this girl. Ugh--some friends--she was skinny, no make-up, her hair was a mess, flat chested, and not too friendly-looking either. After a long debate (about five minutes) I decided she was a little uneasy so I poured on my charms and bought her a few drinks. Well, the more beer I had the better she looked, so I decided to see what I could do for this one. I took her for a drive in the country. I kissed her once, then I took her home. What if she liked me? Then I would have to take her out again and there was no way. Oh well, guess I should be nice and ask her out again so I wouldn't totally crush her. Not to mention that I was pissed because she was falling asleep. The date was made for the next night--a birthday party for a dear friend of mine. At least there would be lots of people there, and I wouldn't have to talk to her much. She wouldn't even acknowledge me at the party, just sat in her own little corner and drank. Since I was feeling pretty good I started to move in. Total shut down. I mean my good intentions and honest feelings were really crushed. Well let me tell you that was the last time I saw her, for a while anyway. My roommate kept seeing her, and I was beginning to feel a little angry and I wasn't going to let it go at that. I tried for another date. This time it would be going to a gay bar just for fun as friends and nothing else--she consented. I picked her up that night and wouldn't you know it out came the cutest little butch I had ever laid eyes on. I swallowed my heart, and drove off. I had an interesting evening--

looking for some fems. Well we became pals and one evening under the stars she said to me, "What is this butch business anyway?" I damn near swallowed my tongue. This girl wasn't a butch or anything, she just hadn't been around. So I told her how I felt. She wasn't about to be owned by anyone. I found out later that she was afraid of me because of my masculine, dominant, possessive traits. What she wanted was a woman. I did a lot of hard soul-searching and let a little of the softness in me come out. You know we started out new. She began to be less frightened of me and I began to really fall for her and so our relationship began.

Well I was still butch, but I was a soft butch still possessive and dominant. She moved in with me and it was time for our relationship to start growing.

Then I was introduced to WLF and I learned how women were oppressed and how I was oppressed as a woman. You know--things were beginning to fit into place. I was a chauvanistic bastard. I was guilty of oppressing the woman I loved. After some conciousness-raising with the gay women in WLF, I started to change.

I guess the thing that really had me tied up inside was feeling guilty about being gay. I felt guilty liking to do the things men do like lift the heavy things, wash the car, grease the car, fix the electrical appliances, etc. Then I realized that these were things society has taught the men to do and that if a woman did them she was queer. But these are things that need to be done and anyone who can do them and wants to can and should!

Sure I still wear men's pants and shirts because I find they are cheaper, built better, and fit better--not because I want to pass for a man. I am not possessive over the woman I love anymore. She is a woman. She has a mind of her own and can make her own decisions. I have no right to tell her what to do. We share equally in all the work that needs to be done and neither one of us is afraid to show our feelings. We are complimentary to each other. We share and recognize each other's needs. Needless to say, we have grown together. Our love has grown and matured. We have found that there is no reason for the butch and fems--that we are women in love. We feel none of the guilt that society has tried to inflict us with. As a result we can contribute more to society separately and together.

Ain't I A Woman?
July 24, 1970

I am a seeker of Life's contradictions,
for I want to know why.
I am a seeker of truth.
I am here to learn about myself,
to learn discernment, and correlation,
and finally, to apply my knowledge.
But now, I want to know about me,
for I don't know who I am,
or what I can be.
What better teacher have I at hand,
than one of my own...
a friend, one who understands,
a mirror, reflecting my images,
a reinforcement, being of like mind and body.
But not to love. Why?
This is the falsity.
Why a boundary on love?
the most positive emotion.
My only answers have been--
"You're a pervert!" "You're sick!"
I was very young when I first received my answers,
and I believed, so I hid.
I hid from myself, back behind
a wall of silence, and I remained
in my hell for many years.
Until not so long ago,
two of my friends began to feel, to be,
what they were.
They were called lesbians, homosexuals;
they were loving.
And so I began to wonder,
eventually I began to admit, first to myself,
then to another, somehow overcoming my fear.
And now, to speak out.
I want to know why it's wrong to love.
I have a body, therefore I must relate
on a physical level,
but why do I have to restrict myself, to love,
why, always, the "either--or",
on the basis that
She has boobs--He doesn't,
and because I do--I can't love her!?
I find that utterly ridiculous.
I am going to love,
regardless of whether you're a man, a woman,
turning blue, or the dog next door.
There are still many
lost in their own hell,
please help them out,
let them be free, let them be.

Robbie
Willamette Bridge July 1970

WOMANHOOD: A CALL FOR SELF-DETERMINATION

"No one here seems to be able to help me. It's Saturday morning. I'm listening to Simon and Garfunkel; drinking coffee. They're singing, "Leaves that are green turn brown - why, Lord, have you forsaken me?" Everyone says, "Peace and Love", is there either? I just walked through the park and remembered happier days. I was happy once, wasn't I? Everything (the song says, "everything I once believed, I've come to doubt") seems unreal. One day goes into the next and I just drift. My husband and the kids are the only things that are real, but I feel I'm not much use to them. I'm not really "with them". This preoccupation with self is driving me crazy and I can't seem to shake it. Everyone says to try harder and I swear each day I will - but - well, today's another day and then there's tomorrow."

Love, Mary

Mary's letter is written to another woman. The woman is a friend and brings honesty of affection into Mary's life. Mary's life is centered around things, avoiding self preoccupation, and her children. Children become the focal point in life, for failure to raise children would render life as totally meaningless. Mary is turning to another woman, for she can no longer fill her life with things to be consumed, children to be raised, and husbands to be emotionally supported. She, a woman, needs to find others like herself through womanhood. She must be free to look to other women for life styles, respect, understanding, love, and all the qualities she has only sought through men.

Women have been kept apart and they need to develop a sisterhood consciousness. Gay Women's Liberation and Women's Liberation groups provide the context in which the evolution of womanhood can take place. Within the movement women can decide together what it should mean to be a woman. To do this, they must first redefine their relationships and ways of relating to one another as women. A woman must be able to view herself as a free entity in an equal unthreatening relationship. Rediscovering womanhood through and with other women is not necessarily turning against men. At present, our sexual roles make relating to men on an equal basis almost impossible.

This is not a calling for all women to convert to lesbianism, (although one level of understanding does apply - "the feeling of strong affection by one woman for another woman.") Intimate relationships between women which develop into natural physical expression should not be avoided or condemned. Women should delve into the reasons why society has a negative attitude toward lesbianism. Why are close relations between women so threatening to the structure? to men? to women themselves?

Women should work to eliminate the barriers which separate them. One of these barriers is the idea that women are to be competitors. And somewhere, inside each woman, is a resentment of the woman image-role. This is a valid reaction against the position of women today. It may have caused women to dislike themselves as human beings. How can one interact with a self-image one rejects?

A community of women with a women's liberation consciousness will enable women to encounter one another without role-playing. They will confront and experience each other as independent individual beings. A new world will open up which gives time for selection of priorities rather than participation in roles defined by others or through men. A woman will be free from focusing her life efforts on "catching a man" in order to feel a necessary element in present-day society. If women are willing to liberate themselves now and refuse the identity society offers, they can then free others. People will become people. Relating will become equal among individuals and womanhood will have something to do with the destiny of the human spirit.

Gay Women's Liberation, Berkeley
January 1970

NEW YORK ALL-WOMEN'S DANCE

On Friday April 3, 1970, the women of Gay Liberation Front held the first All-Women's Dance. Previous to this there had been other "GLF" dances but these were not well attended by women. The response to this first All-Women's Dance was in fact mind-blowing. At peak there were somewhere near 250 women dancing together, in circles, in lines, in twos, in threes, laughing, playing, talking, hugging, kissing and just loving each other. The atmosphere was warm and close and for the first time publically those of us from women's liberation who attended realized a fuller more expanded meaning of what we have been referring to in the women's movement as "Sisterhood".

Those who came to the dance from WL foresaw that other WL members would attend. We were all quite surprised to see one another. From this spontaneous public support voiced by the presence of several WL groups it was evident that a recognition of sisterhood with all women was ready to be lived and dealt with in the women's movement.

Although several WL groups were represented, in comparison to the membership in the women's liberation movement and in regard to the number of women in total who attended the dance, WL participation was in the minority. And where were our other sisters? Why hadn't they attended?

Coincidently, or otherwise, nearly all the women in the "Class Workshop" attended the dance. (The "Class Workshop" was initiated by members of "The New Feminists" to study the problems of "class" in the women's movement--represented in the workshop are Chips & Scraps, The Feminists, Redstockings, a secretary's group, and WITCH.) At the dance we who came from the workshop were aware that a turning point in the women's movement was implicit in the dance. We were excited to talk about its significance and did so the following night at the "Class Workshop" meeting. We decided to write a public statement of our responses to the dance. Both those of us who went and those who did not wrote about our feelings toward the dance. Here are the responses:

DIDN'T GO

A dance has connotations of all the normal (oppressive) ins and outs of male/female sexual relationships. Dancing is sexual. This is what I thought about when I heard of the women's dance, sponsored by GLF women. Our group decided to go. Friday was a shit day at work worse than usual and I didn't feel like doing anything. We met at 8:00 at a sister's place to discuss the dance. Whether we'd go or not. A liberal discussion of homosexuality. (Some of us had had "experiences with women"--when I was 12--but this made no difference.) Since being in WL my relationships with women have been "political"--a new group of women friends in the last 10 months. Friendships grew out of this slowly. I had made up my mind not to go, not because I am dedicated to having emotional/sexual experiences only with men but out of fear of breaking down this political, nearly formal relationship with my sisters and sisters I would meet; I talked at the meeting with the idea of being persuaded. I had already

made up my mind not to go. A sister suggested we go, to have fun. She went. I didn't go because I'm afraid of my feelings for women. It is not that simple. I know men hate women, hate me--I am afraid of them; men have said they love me and it didn't always feel so bad, maybe because I told myself (they told me) it feels good. I am afraid of making love with women (this is where the idea of lesbianism takes me). I am afraid of my body, to think of going to the women's dance made me think of all these things, the fears are lateral spread across my mind, like the idea of climbing up something high when I know I am afraid of heights --I am the object of the lover, object of the fall. Afraid of the repetition of these roles. Afraid of dancing with sisters because it means "sexual". It's quite a list of abstractions--it's pretty much what I imagine that scares me. I went home because "I'm exhausted" and watched the television.

DID GO

Lesbianism is the supreme insult and threat to the male. It insults him because it implies that you prefer another woman to him. He is indignant at the fact that you would compare him to a "mere woman," that you would actually consider a woman his equal.

Sexually you are stripping him of his age old perogative--he is not your only source of love and affection. You have a choice and implicit in that choice is that your needs and pleasure are equal to or have priority over his. This is the reason the "Lesbians" (and let's keep in mind that the word lesbian is a male supermacist distinction which artificially defines love among women as purely sexual) are ridiculed and persecuted in our male supremacist bourgeois society. This is the reason that the oppressor has called the women's liberation movement "a bunch of Lesbians."

All of us must recognize the political significance of what is called by men "Lesbianism." We cannot afford to push aside this issue because of cultural biases or fear. Let's face the truth: the greatest threat to men is solidarity among women and "Lesbianism" epitomizes this solidarity.

Let us also remember that our political views are expressed in our everyday actions. They reveal both how we think and feel about ourselves and our sisters. Who do we in fact prefer to be with, to work and plan with, to play and dance with.

DID GO

The Wednesday before the "GLF Dance", I made a public declaration in my women's liberation group that I would no longer relate to men in any kind of emotional relationship. Men, I said, had infected us and the world with the disease of "Heterosexuality." I had concluded that the only potentially "healthy" emotional relationships could take place with other women.

Once before during my trip through women's liberation I had come to believing that relationships with other women had to be a part of women's liberation. I call this my bi-sexual stage. The short affair I had ended not entirely as I would have liked it to. The problems that opened

up I wasn't able to deal with to my satisfaction. It's different now and I see more what I think has to happen relating to other women and the single most important thing being to transform whatever "Male-Heterosexual" orientations we have in ourselves.

At the same time I declared myself a potential lover of women. I announced I would attend the "GLF Dance" and if there was anyone else who wanted to go. One other member in the group said she would attend.

Most of the other members objected to the idea of a "Dance." I also objected to the formal aspect of a dance, which I had associated with "Heterosexual" relationships. But, in spite of the label I saw the possibility of having an experience that would counter the limited "Dance" definition and that was that there would be present "only" women in a social context of "wanting" to relate to women, as opposed to relating through men.

What I experienced at the dance was the sense of reopened emotional feeling without restriction, for women. When I danced close to another woman the feeling of her body flooded me with emotion. Thinking about this afterward I was aware of how much feeling for each other we do have, yet are told not to express and how this must really stultify our personal relations. For me the Dance was my first public step in affirming total sisterhood.

DID GO

The All-Women's Dance was an expansion of space for use by women in both a literal sense and psychological sense. It aroused in me an incipient sense of possession and freedom men feel everywhere else. For once I felt relatively inconspicuous and able to achieve the detachment necessary for freedom in action rather than the compulsive involvement women are usually made to feel. The dance impressed everyone from women's liberation so well that this opening space will not be lost but will be fought for as our right.

On a more subjective level I was moved but experienced no great upheaval. It was not anything like a religious conversion. The idea of women loving each other just became more palpable and natural to me. I don't know how and I don't know when but I'm just open.

DID GO

I guess I'm naive but I had expected women's liberation to be better represented at the women's dance. I mean, we have an all-women's movement; we have all-women's meetings; we had an all-women's mixed media show at the AU a month or so ago--it didn't seem to me like such a big step to go to an all-women's dance. But apparently it is. When I suggested going to people in my small group I was greeted in some cases with shock, but mostly with rationalizations: "Lesbians are always putting down heterosexual feminists" was one of the more thoughtful ones; mostly it was "I don't like to dance" or "I'm too tired." Well, it's no surprise that lesbians put us down--the movement has so far been pretty carefully anti-lesbian, so what's in it for them? It's also no surprise that many women don't like to dance or think they don't--a dance with men is a parade, a cattle auction, a drag.

Dancing with women is something else again. It was one of the most beautiful experiences of my life--a total high. And it turns out that it *was* a big step. Because I am learning to love women, and the dance was a first step.

DID GO

In WL I have developed a closeness with women and found that I enjoy having women friends. Yet I always felt a fear of expressing my feelings in a physical way by hugging or touching. The fears had lessened as the warmth and love I feel for other women has deepened. When I heard about the dance I felt that it was a chance to express my feelings openly. The dance was exciting to me because of the warm feelings I received from the women there, many of whom I had never met before. The women were open and expressed their affection to each other freely. I also felt a sense of belonging since the women here also loved other women and showed it. I felt that I had broken out of an old shell and could relax and enjoy myself at a dance, which I had never been able to do before.

DIDN'T GO

I was standing by the wall--lined up with the other chickens--all waiting to be picked out by the Almighty BOY who would choose YOU and give you some reason for feeling you had a right to live.

That is the one memory I have of the only dance I ever went to. That was 13 years ago, but the vision remains and it stinks.

Anything that calls itself a "Dance" still brings forth this same repulsion. I automatically transferred the feeling to the "All-Women's Dance". I discredited women by thinking we would take on the values of the other sex.

I'm not against the wall anymore. I apologize to my comrades and to myself. The oppressor already knows that if we unite we will have the strength to win. They therefore do everything in their power to keep us in an antagonistic relation to each other. Lesbianism is a division among us that they are particularly careful to maintain. They have imposed social and legal penalties against it so as to make us afraid to love other women. They are aware that if they can keep us from loving and respecting each other they have robbed us of our greatest strength. The dance signifies a turning point in the women's movement, for we are beginning to recognize in a gut way what "Solidarity" really means.

Members of the Class Workshop
RAT April 17, 1970

LESBIAN OPPRESSION

The gay woman is a person who is very often overlooked within radical liberation circles. Her oppression is two-fold - female and homosexual (if she is non-Caucasian, her oppression is three-fold).

Her two-fold oppression brings forth looks of resentment, feelings of uptightness, and cries of ignorance. She encounters social, political, and economic oppression. Her oppressors are of no particular class, race, structure, etc. Yet, they are identifiable, as most oppressors are identifiable to most of the oppressed.

Well to ramble on about oppression would fill a book; I only want to exemplify an oppressed happening in a short article. On a social level, gay women want to meet other gay women; on an economic level, they frequently pay to do so at most encountering places. (Their economic oppression also includes job discrimination as well as social exploitation; but right now, that's the written subject.) These encountering places are gay bars. The gay bars are exploiters of gay women (and of gay men, too).

A typical bar on a typical weekend: $3.00 for entering (which includes two drinks), $1.00 for a can of beer, if you don't like watered-down mixed drinks, $1.00 every time the proprietor sees you without a drink (you cannot stay unless you are with a drink), 25¢ coat check, crowdedness, occasional heterosexual male googlers, Mafia guardsmen at the door.

Straight bars do not exist in this web of social harrassment. This is oppression. Where are gay women going to meet other gay women if they feel oppressed by the above condition? An alternative is needed. An alternative was made. The Gay Liberation Front has held mixed (gays of both sexes) dances that were predominately male. The women of GLF felt that their sisters might want an all women alternative, instead.

On April 3, GLF sponsored an all women's dance which was held at Alternate U. The purpose of the dance was to give our sisters an alternative to the oppressive Mafia-controlled gay bars. In the general locale of the gay community in the Village, only two bars exist predominately for gay women. The GLF dance was held within a four-block radius of these two bars.

Two weeks prior to the dance, six GLF women were threatened by the owner of one of these bars while they were giving small calling cards advertising the dance to other girls in the bar. The owner approached the GLF women with the cards; and she told them if they continued advertising, they wouldn't have a dance or an organization.

At 3:15 am, the night of the dance, the first attempt was made to carry out this threat. Three stereotype (big, broad, and mean) mafioso forcibly pushed their way into the All Women's Dance. When questioned repeatedly as to their identity, they answered by threatening to arrest the sisters for unlawful assembly. The dance was held in a hall which GLF had legally rented for the evening. They then threatened the GLF women with arrest on the basis of not having a liquor license and rapidly quoted prices that

neighboring bars have paid them. The dance did not require a liquor license because donations and not prices were suggested for admission and refreshments (beer and soda). After much verbal and physical harrassment (a woman who tried to leave was pushed toward a wall, another woman was grabbed by her coat collar and had her coat snatched from her back as she fearfully dashed down the stairs to escape the harrassment of these imposters; they physically refused exit to any of the women), they showed the women a badge which was later suggested to be phoney by uniformed policemen who appeared twenty minutes after these men left. Before they left, the three were questioned as to who sent them. "Gianni's, Kookie's?" They laughed, snickering, "who's that, never heard of them. Oh they're just characters out of Zap Comix." Why bother hassling with reason when they knew Gianni's and Kookie's are just two of our gay tavern-owner oppressors.

The uniformed, legal law-enforcing police were called by the women to verify the identity of these three. The uniformed police stated that no call was made with any precinct to check out the dance, that the dance was legal, and that these three men showed invalid identification. But the legal police refused to do anything about the incident.

This threatening incident is another example of oppression of gay women by an exploitative system. The system tried to scare us but did not succeed. Instead, they brought their oppressive acts to light where they will be dealt with as gay sisters are now more ready and determined to come out and deal with the oppressors.

Kathy Wakeham
Come Out! June 1970

GAY IS GOOD

Look out, straights. Here comes the Gay Liberation Front, springing up like warts all over the bland face of Amerika, causing shudders of indigestion in the delicately balanced bowels of the Movement. Here come the Gays, marching with six-foot banners to Washington and embarrassing the liberals, taking over Mayor Alioto's office, staining the good names of War Resistor's League and Women's Liberation by refusing to pass for straight anymore.

We've got chapters in New York/San Francisco/San Jose/Los Angeles/Minneapolis/Philadelphia/Wisconsin/Detroit and I hear maybe even in Dallas. We're gonna make our own revolution because we're sick of revolutionary posters which depict straight he-man types and earth mothers, with guns and babies. We're sick of the Panthers lumping us together with the capitalists in their term of universal contempt -"faggot".

And I am personally sick of liberals who say they don't care who sleeps with whom, it's what you do outside of bed that counts. This is what homosexuals have been trying to get straights to understand for years. Well, it's too late for liberalism. Because what I do outside of bed may have nothing to do with what I do inside - but my consciousness is branded, is permeated with homosexuality. For years I have been branded with *your* label for me. The result is that when I am among gays or in bed with another woman, I am a person, not a lesbian. When I am observable to the straight world, I become gay. You are my litmus paper.

We want something more now, something more than the tolerance you never gave us. But to understand that, you must understand who we are.

We are the extrusions of your unconscious mind - your worst fears made flesh. From the beautiful boys at Cherry Grove to the aging queens in the uptown bars, the taxi-driving dykes to the lesbian fashion models, the hookers (male and female) on 42nd Street, the leather lovers...and the very ordinary very un-lurid gays...we are the sort of people everyone was taught to despise - and now we are shaking off the chains of self-hatred and marching on your citadels of repression.

Liberalism isn't good enough for us. And we are just beginning to discover it. Your friendly smile of acceptance - from the safe position of heterosexuality - isn't enough. As long as you cherish that secret belief that you are a little bit better, because you sleep with the opposite sex, you are still asleep in your cradle and we will be the nightmare that awakens you.

We are women and men who, from the time of our earliest memories, have been in revolt against the sex-role structure and the nuclear family structure. The roles we have played amongst ourselves, the self-deceit, the compromises and the subterfuges - these have never totally obscured the fact that we exist outside the traditional structure - and our existence threatens it.

Understand this - that the worst part of being a homosexual is having to keep it *secret*. Not the occasional murders by police or teenage queer-beaters, not the loss of jobs or expulsion from schools or dishonorable discharges - but the daily knowledge that what you are is so awful that it cannot be revealed. The violence against us is sporadic. Most of us are not affected. But the internal violence of being made to carry - or

choosing to carry - the load of your straight society's unconscious guilt - this is what tears us apart, what makes us want to stand up in the offices, in the factories and schools and shout out our true identities.

We were rebels from our earliest days - somewhere, maybe just about the time we started to go to school, we rejected straight society. Unconsciously. Then, later, society rejected us, as we came into full bloom. The homosexuals who hide, who play it straight or pretend that the issue of homosexuality is unimportant - are only hiding the truth from themselves. They are trying to become part of a society that they rejected instinctively when they were five years old, to pretend that it is the result of heredity, or a bad mother, or anything but a gut reaction of nausea against the roles forced on us.

If you are homosexual, and you get tired of waiting around for the liberals to repeal the sodomy laws, and begin to dig yourself - and get angry - you are on your way to being a radical. Get in touch with the reasons that made you reject straight society as a kid (remembering my own revulsion against the vacant women drifting in and out of supermarkets, vowing never to live like them) and realize that you were *right*. Straight roles stink.

And you straights - look down the street, at the person whose sex is not readily apparent. Are you uneasy? Or are you made more uneasy by the stereotype gay, the flaming faggot or diesel dyke? Or most uneasy by the friend you thought was straight - and isn't? We want you to be uneasy, be a little less comfortable in your straight roles. And to make you uneasy, we behave outrageously - even though we pay a heavy price for it - and our outrageous behavior comes out of your rage.

But what is strange to you is natural to us. Let me illustrate. GLF "liberates" a gay bar for the evening. We come in. The people already there are seated quietly at the bar. Two or three couples are dancing. It's a down place. And the GLF takes over. Men dance with men, women with women, men with women, everyone in circles. No roles. You ever see that at a straight party? Not men with men - this is particularly verboten. No, and you're not likely to, while the Gays in the Movement are still passing for straight in order to keep up the good names of their organizations or to keep up the pretense that they are acceptable - and to have to get out of the organization they worked so hard for.

True, some Gays play the same role-games among themselves that straights do. Isn't every minority group fucked over by the values of the majority colture? But the really important thing about being gay is that you are forced to notice how much sex-role differentiation is pure artifice, is nothing but a game.

Once I dressed up for an ACLU benefit. I wore a black lace dress, heels, elaborate hairdo and makeup. And felt like - a drag queen. Not like a woman - I am a woman every day of my life - but like the ultimate in artifice, a woman posing as a drag queen.

The roles are beginning to wear thin. The makeup is cracking. The roles - breadwinner, little wife, screaming fag, bulldyke, James Bond - are the cardboard characters we are always trying to fit into, as if being human and spontaneous were so horrible that we each have to pick on a character out of a third-rate novel and try to cut ourselves down to its size. And you cut off your homosexuality - and we cut off our heterosexuality.

Back to the main difference between us. We Gays are separate from you - we are alien. You have mamaged to drive your own homosexuality down

under the skin of your mind - and to drive us down and out into the gutter of self-contempt. We, ever since we became aware of being gay, have each day been forced to internalize the labels: "I am a pervert, a dyke, a fag, etc." And the days pass, until we look at you out of our homosexual bodies, bodies that have become synonymous and consubstantial with homosexuality, bodies that are no longer bodies but labels; and sometimes we wish we were like you, sometimes we wonder how you can stand yourselves.

It's difficult for me to understand how you can dig each other as human beings - in a man-woman relationship - how you can relate to each other in spite of your sex roles. It must be awfully difficult to talk to each other, when the woman is trained to repress what the man is trained to express, and vice-versa. Do straight men and women talk to each other? Or does the man talk and the woman nod approvingly? Is love possible between heterosexuals; or is it all a case of women posing as nymphs, earth-mothers, sex-objects, what-have-you; and men writing the poetry of romantic illusions to these walking stereotypes?

I tell you, the function of a homosexual is to make you uneasy.

And now I will tell you what we want, we radical homosexuals: not for you to tolerate us, or to accept us, but to understand us. And this you can do only by becoming one of us. We want to reach the homosexuals entombed in you, to liberate our brothers and sisters, locked in the prisons of your skulls.

We want you to understand what it is to be our kind of outcast - but also to understand our kind of love, to hunger for your own sex. Because unless you understand this, you will continue to look at us with uncomprehending eyes, fake liberal smiles; you will be incapable of loving us.

We will never go straight until you go gay. As long as you divide yourselves, we will be divided from you - separated by a mirror trick of your mind. We will no longer allow you to drop us - or the homosexuals in yourselves - into the reject bin; labelled sick, childish or perverted. And because we will not wait, your awakening may be a rude and bloody one. It's your choice. You will never be rid of us, because we reproduce ourselves out of your bodies - and out of your minds. We are one with you.

Martha Shelley

RAT February 24, 1970

A KISS ON THE MOUTH

In the last month or so, gay and bisexual women of this community have started to get together to discuss the concept of Gay Women's Liberation. Gay liberation is, for all practical purposes, a male group. There are many reasons for the poor showing of females at Gay Liberation meetings. First of all, gay males seem to outnumber gay females in this society. Females in our society are given a solid grounding in "get married and have kids", ie are defined by their men. Hence many gay and bisexual women are forced by the society into heterosexual roles. In addition, the few women who do show up at Gay Liberation functions find male chauvinism is prevalent just as in straight society, with the additional factor that many gay men dislike, fear and generally ignore women.

For these reasons, we are getting together with our sisters and are in the process of forming our own group. Our group is closely connected with women's liberation (of course). It is, in effect, the Gay-Bi Caucus of women's liberation; for female homosexuality is essentially a women's liberation trip. Female homosexuality eliminates the necessity of tolerating male chauvinism in our lives without giving up the need for meaningful love relations. We are told by our society from the time we can understand that women are the lesser sex. Women who do not believe that they are inferior have little inclination towards "woman's role" in society and in relationships which follow the pattern of male domination. The alternatives: Find a liberated male (a rare species) who respects his partner as an equal, ie treats her as a human being, not just a piece of meat. This is virtually impossible in the context of our society. Another alternative taken by increasing numbers of women these days is celibacy. Unfortunately, most women who take this route do not realize that they are choosing still another male-oriented alternative. Implicit in the concept of celibacy is the idea that either women must get their sexual-love satisfaction from a man, or they must undergo the self-imposed punishment of total abstinence. This also reinforces the notion that women are inadequate humans and that any bond between two of them must ultimately remain incomplete. Assuming that if a healthy love relationship exists between two people there must be mutual respect, a woman who is capable of loving another woman is a woman who can really respect herself as a woman.

Many people who haven't given much thought to homosexuality cannot conceive of a love relationship between members of the same sex. A homosexual relationship has the potential for the dissolution of the false sex roles our sick society has imposed on us. A woman who makes love to another woman can rest assured that she is not being "screwed".

Most of the women in our group are bisexual. For those who don't understand the term, a bisexual person is not a woman or man who possesses both sexual organs ("the pagina", as a four-year-old friend of mine says), but rather is a person who can love a human of either sex. We believe that in a Utopian society bisexuality will be the norm. At the present, functioning bisexuals are very rare since our society immediately categorizes bisexuals as "homosexual", or intimidates the bisexual into professing a heterosexual preference.

We call upon our ostensibly "straight" sisters in women's liberation to help us break down the walls previously imposed upon us by a male-dominated society which have kept us from communication with each other.

IF THAT'S ALL THERE IS --

Assemblyman Willie Brown, author of twice-defeated California legislation to repeal those laws regulating sexual activity between consenting adults, at the SIR Political Action Dinner at California Hall delivered a message of unity--unity of all oppressed peoples, unity of all minority groups, unity within the homophile community.

The greatest political force to effect change, he said, could come from a coalition of racial and ethnic minorities, the homophile community, the student and women's liberation movements. The occasion followed the closing session of the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations, which had displayed vividly our divisions rather than our unity, and Brown cautioned that whatever differences each of us had within our own communities should be kept within our own families.

It was an unfortunate analogy. Families usually include women, and they usually include youth--both of whom are integral parts of the homophile community, both of whom were ignored in the grand gesture of unity that closed the festivities. Willie's message went unheeded.

After fifteen years of working for the homophile movement--of mediating, counselling, appeasing, of working for coalition and unity--I am facing a very real identity crisis. Like NACHO I have been torn apart. I am bereft. For I have during this week of struggle between the men and the women, the conservatives and the Gay Liberationists, been forced to the realization that I have no brothers in the homophile movement.

Oh yes, when six of my sisters from the Daughters of Bilitis, Nova and Gay Women's Liberation stood with me to confront the NACHO meeting on August 26th (the day of the National Women's Strike) about the relevance of the homophile movement to the women within it, the delegates passed a resolution in support of the women's liberation movement. They rationalized that all of their organizations were open to women, but the women didn't join in numbers and they just didn't know what else they could do to relate to their Lesbian sisters. We suggested that their programs and their publications were not inclusive of or relevant to women. They decried the segregationist organizations which we represented, but would not address themselves to the underlying reason for the existence of separate women's organizations--that the female homosexual faces sex discrimination not only in the heterosexual world, but within the homophile community.

And so, like my sister, Robin Morgan, I have come to the conclusion that I must say, "Good Bye to All That." Goodbye to the wasteful, meaninglessverbiage of empty resolutions made by hollow men of self-proclaimed privilege. They neither speak for us nor to us. They acknowledged us on our "day" and then dished us that very same night in their "male only" sanctuaries. It's the system, and there was not one among them with guts enough to put a stop to it. And, too late, they shall find that the joke is really on them.

Goodbye, my alienated brothers. Goodbye to the male chauvinists of the homophile movement who are so wrapped up in the "cause" they espouse that they have lost sight of the people for whom the cause came into being. Goodbye to the bulwark of the Mattachine grandfathers, self-styled monarchs of a youth cult which is no longer theirs. As they cling to their old ideas and their old values in a time that calls for radical change, I must bid them farewell. There is so much to be done, and I have neither the stomach nor the inclination to stand by and watch them self-destruct.

Goodbye to co-ed organizations like SIR. The Political Action Dinner, we were told, was a "community" project. The Society for Individual Rights supposedly had finally learned that politics isn't a loner's game and called out the forces of coalition in the gay community. The Daughters of Bilitis responded, came to the first planning committee meetings and were, as usual, overlooked as plans progressed. Better it should be a SIR blow job. And it was.

Goodbye to all that. The finale at the head table said it all. It was no oversight. It was a demonstration of where the head is at--not just one man's head, for he was representative of the vast majority of those men present. Women are invisible. There is only one credential for acceptance in the homophile "brotherhood"--the handle Mayor Alioto couldn't find on Women's Day.

Goodbye, not just to SIR, but all those homophile organizations across the country with an open door policy for women. It's only window dressing for the public, and in the small towns of suburbia, for mutual protection. It doesn't really mean anything and smacks of paternalism. Goodbye, too, (temporarily, I trust) to my sisters who demean themselves by accepting "women's status" in these groups--making and serving the coffee, doing the secretarial work, soothing the brows of the policy makers who tell them, "We're doing it all for you, too." Don't believe it, sisters, for you are only an afterthought that never took place.

Goodbye to Vector. Goodbye to the "Police Beat"--the defense of wash room sex and pornographic movies. That was never my bag anyway. Goodbye to the Women's Page and the NACHO delegate who admitted that's how he regarded my column, professing all the while, of course, that he considered it most worth while reading. He meant it as a compliment. Goodbye to my editor, George Mendenhall, who has tried to understand and who is seeking to cement relations between the men and women of the community. He can't go it alone. So I say, "Go ahead, George. Let it all hang out. It's all they have, and that needs to be exposed."

Goodbye to all the "representative" homophile publications that look more like magazines for male nudist colonies. Goodbye to the biased male point of view. The editors say they have encouraged women to contribute, but that they don't. Nor will they until the format is changed, policy broadened and their material taken seriously.

Goodbye to the gay bars that discriminate against women. Goodbye to those that "allow" them in only if they dress up in skirts, while the men slop around in their "queer" costumes. Gay Liberationists are right when they observe that gay bars ghettoize the homophile community. They are, after all, our chief base for socialization, for meeting people of our own kind. But there is no time or place for forming friendships, for exchanging ideas, for camaraderie--only for dispensing of drinks and sex partners.

Goodbye to the Halloween Balls, the drag shows and parties. It was fun, while it lasted. But the humor has gone out of the game. The exaggerations of the switching (or swishing) of sex roles has become the norm in the public eye. While we were laughing at ourselves we became the laughing stock and lost the personhood we were seeking. It is time to stop minicking the heterosexual society we've been trying to escape. It is time to get our heads together to find out who we really are.

Goodbye to NACHO. It never really happened. It was a non-organization consisting only of reams of purple dittoed rules and regulations that no one had the time nor stamina to read and big-mouthed, self-appointed and anointed homophile leaders--the steeple without the people.

Goodbye to Gay Liberation, too. They applauded the Lesbians who wished to establish common cause with them and the other men at the NACHO meeting. But somehow we are left with the feeling their applause was for the disruption of the meeting, not its purpose. There is reason for the splits within their own movement, why there is a women's caucus in GLF in New York and why there is a Gay Women's Liberation in the San Francisco Bay Area. Like the tired old men they berate they have not come to grips with the gut issues. Until they do, their revolution cannot be ours. Their liberation would only further enslave us.

Goodbye to the various Councils on Religion and the Homosexual. Like the institutions they sprang from they are bastions of male prestige--male evangelists from two disparate worlds. There is no place for women in the Christian and homophile brotherhoods. Be warned, my sisters, CRH spells only purgatory for you.

Goodbye to the male homophile community. "Gay is good," but not good enough--so long as it is limited to white males only. We joined with you in what we mistakenly thought was a common cause. A few of you tried, we admit. But you are still too few, and even you fall short of the mark. You, too, are victims of our culture. Fifteen years of masochism is enough. None of us is getting any younger or any closer to where it's really at. So, regretfully, I must say goodbye to you, too. It's been nice and all that, but I have work to do. My friends neither look up to me nor down at me. They face me as equals, and we interact reciprocally with respect and love.

There is no hate in this goodbye--only the bitter sting of disappointment. Momentarily I am pregnant with rage at your blindness and your deafness--the psychosomatic symptoms of narcissism and egocentricity. But my rage will pass. Most of it has been spent already. For I realize you were programmed by society for your role of supremacy. But somehow I expected more of you. I had hoped that you were my brothers and would grow up, to recognize that freedom is not self contained. You cannot be free until you free me--and all women--until you become aware that, in all the roles and games you play, you are always "IT".

Believe it or not, there is love, too, in this farewell--just as there has always been. How could any one hold a grudge against helpless beings who are compelled to grope for their very existence? But I must leave you--for your good as well as mine. I refuse to be your scapegoat. By removing the target, you may no longer mock me. Besides, I must go where the action is--where there is still hope, where there is possibility for personal and collective growth. It is a revelation to find acceptance, equality, love, and friendship--everything we sought in the homophile community--not there, but in the women's movement.

I will not be your "nigger" any longer. Nor was I ever your mother. Those were stultifying roles you laid on me, and I shall no longer concern myself with your toilet training. You're in the big leagues now, and we're both playing for big stakes. They didn't turn out to be the same.

As I bid you adieu, I leave each of you to your own device. Take care of it, stroke it gently, mouth it and fondle it. As the center of your consciousness, it's really all you have.

Del Martin
October 1970

STATEMENT OF GAY WOMEN'S LIBERATION

Gay Women's Liberation is a loose confederation of small groups whose common denominators are that we are female and gay or bisexual. (Translation: we can feel love for other women.) And we are oriented to Women's Liberation.

We first got together at a Gay Liberation symposium and quickly realized it was just another male dominated movement, and could only stifle our needs. We further felt that our presence would slow down any attempts the gay men were making to raise their consciousnesses about male chauvinism.

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Probably the only difference between our small groups and groups composed of "straight" women is that we talk more about relationships between women, whereas they talk more about relationships between men and women.

This poses a dilemma, since a major feminist tenet (one every woman can relate to, regardless of her experience) is that sex not be the first priority in a relationship--with man or women.

Some gay women see other women as sex objects. Once a woman has identified herself as gay, many straight women see her as a sex object: ie, either they are secretly fascinated or else they fear she will treat them as a sex object.

This is an understandable state of affairs, given that in our society the only legal (allowed) relationships involving love and affection are marriage and blood. And we know (are just beginning to find out) how little love, affection or trust is permitted or possible in these relationships.

We in our group have come to understand that women loving each other is a natural process; that being gay is a learned process, and at that a process designed to prevent women from loving and trusting each other, just as marriage prevents men and women from loving and trusting each other.

It is tempting to make a blanket statement that any sexual activity other than masturbation leaves one open to exploitation situations. At this time absolutely no one in our society is healthy sexually. Even two women can easily fall into the male/female roles we have begun to find so abhorrent. And yet it is not quite the same, since any two women will be more able to communicate about, analyze, and change their behavior, being peers in their common oppression, than any man and woman. The operative word being change;--that's what all this is about.

Additionally, the fact that these relationships are building up through small group/affinity group interaction means that for the first time in herstory we are able to explore our attitudes toward each other without secret fear or guilt. This process is a necessary part of liberation for all women.

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In any case, no woman should be close enough physically (in terms of inches and feet) to experience sex vibrations with anyone who is not a comrade. One's understanding of the word comrade being relative

to the degree of enlightenment of one's consciousness.

If you think you are attracted to a woman, let her know. If you feel that you're getting sex vibes from a woman, ask her. Don't automatically get into the invisible courtship or invisible running away game. These games build erotic tension; they were designed to do that.

All women play male/female games on each other, not just "homosexual" women. By confronting them openly and nonpejoritively we will learn to overcome them and will at the same time deepen our analysis of the entire male oriented/dominated structure. Our ability to overcome the structure will only be as developed as our analysis and the degree to which we no longer operate in those terms.

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As it stands now, our movement only a couple of years old, not all the women have been heard from; not all our experiences have been pooled.

It is difficult to say what actions our group is performing, since the word action is in the process of being redefined. Men have defined action for so long, and we have been "passive" for so long. When the Roman males institutionalized male dominance they were careful to define their words accordingly. We are still buried under them.

Gay Women's Liberation
March 1970
printed in IT AINT ME BABE August 1970

WHAT IN HELL AM I SUPPOSED TO DO WITH
SUCH A FEELING?

I can't call it love
because of what society has done to our
relationships with each other
in the name of it.

I can't listen to records
and revel in the feeling
the way I used to.
Because of the silver linings
and only you's
that I see now.

And if that isn't enough
I worry about it not being
collective.
This feeling I have and
the collective I live in
are both meaningful to me,
but what is the place of each in each?

That's not even considering sex.

For that one add about
ten tons of guilt
acquired over the years.
If my puritan soul isn't chastising
myself for being too consumed with
matters of the flesh

you can go around touching
anyone you please, but the minute
you think you care for someone,
Touching them gets escalated into a
Matter of the Flesh.

Then I'm worried about a physical gesture
of affection being taken
as some carnal advance.

(Two comments I've heard today remind
me that people think the only thing
gay people care about is MEAT.)

And when I realize that while I'm occupied
with these thoughts
This country is continuing its
extermination of the Third World,

I feel ashamed.

My problem does not inflict pain on me
like Amerika does
to my far away sisters.
So who am I to call such
luxury a problem?

yet neither of them will go away:
The Third World
or my feelings.

Besides
it's unproductive
to be thinking about
this person all the time
when my mind should be on the struggle.

There's no basis anymore
for anything
Women's liberation has questioned
it all.
But when will come the answers?

And then comes the latest
IT AINT ME BABE
which reflects the controversy
in the movement so well
that the paper almost falls apart
in my hands.

The Word (temporary I'm sure) from the
Berkeley Gay Women's Liberation
is that you should merely
walk up to the person and say:
"I care for you and feel physically
attracted to you"
Well fine.

but it's so hard.

It's a good idea though
We both thought so
as we made a joke of it
(for protection):
We could all carry around copies of the
IT AINT ME BABE
and when the time was right
point to the article and say:
"paragraph three"

And that would mean about the feeling.

But neither of us did.

AINT I A WOMAN? September 1970

A LETTER FROM MARY

TO MY SISTERS:

We have all said it in our leaflets, to our friends, in our screams in the night: what we want is equal, open, loving relationships where each person can see the other as an individual human being not a member of some mythic group, where each person loves and wants the other instead of needing her for some quality he does not himself possess. So, why when I affirm all this, do you see me with strange eyes? Why when I love my sisters wholly do I make you uneasy? Why, if I talk of my feelings, do you look away or, if you listen, at the end relax as if to say: "Well, I guess you had to do that...it's probably very healthy that you brought your secret out into the open...but now that's over and we don't, thank God, have to talk about it anymore." And after that, every remark I make is filtered through the label "lesbian".

We all realize how terrible it is to be fragmented as women are in this society, split into roles, having secret identities, split mind from body. I know this. I could not stand being torn to pieces trying to love with my body men who could not even hear my voice. And now you tell me that I must do this? Now you tell me my body is to be an organizing tool, winning men away from their contempt of me, a reward for understanding an obscure point in our literature? I may love my sisters with my mind and heart, but my body belongs still to men or to no one? Or you say it belongs to me, but the love I express with it must be limited, by tacit command. "You may 'love' your sister...you may not make love with her. If it really can't be helped, we won't totally shut you out but of course you understand we can't have you speaking for women's liberation anymore...your feelings are too uniquely your own, too personal. In short, you are the second-class citizens we need to keep us from hitting bottom, to keep us from completely losing men's approval...you are our women, every movement needs some so that it can be political."

The irony of it all is that I probably would never have discovered my homosexuality without women's liberation. You have helped to create what you now despise or fear, the incarnation of the sisterhood which was to be a lovely ideal, a sentiment of pure girlhood. Why does my body, which you claim should not be alienated from me, make my love for my sisters suddenly something furtive, something lower, something which is somehow wrong? Would that be too much of a separation from straight society, from men? But weren't these the questions we asked ourselves when we first thought of a woman's movement and we were afraid of taking ourselves, our feelings our oppression seriously? Or do you think that I will attach or seduce you, that loving other women somehow makes me a man or one of those "oversexed niggers and queers"?

The accusation of being a movement of lesbians will always be powerful if we cannot say, "Being a lesbian is good." Nothing short of that will suffice as an answer.

This wasn't meant to be totally bitter, because I know some of how you feel, after all, I was brought up to be a heterosexual too. My mother never

even mentioned homosexuals until the other day, when she spoke of them the way the Sunday sermons used to speak of lepers. I didn't even know they were possible until I was in college. I can remember the terrible desperation I felt when I began to realize that I wasn't going to be able to communicate with men. My immediate reaction was to go out and get screwed by the first guy that came along. I worked terribly hard on that relationship; I guess I felt it was my last chance. I explained myself hour after hour, sometimes articulately, sometimes incoherently, but always with kindness and sweet reason. I was driving myself crazy trying to love someone who wanted a Woman, not me. I began to avoid him, not to be home after I had told him to come over, to sleep with him to shut him up, to be silent out of exhaustion, to take tranquilizers and do yoga for hours to relax. And I couldn't even see how much more I hated him for making me hate another person. And all this was after I had been in Women's Liberation for 9 or 10 months. Before Women's Liberation, I had always conveniently disappeared after a relatively short time with a guy, as soon as I realized that they couldn't even see through the games I was playing or that they only wanted a particular one of my roles. But I had learned: Men are people too. If you wish them to be honest, love them as friends, Wow, had I learned. I was honest and loving and I was rapidly being torn into shreds.

After a couple of months of this I was beginning to believe that celibacy forever was the only thing that would save whatever was left of me, which was not much. And then I found myself loving another woman. And I was scared, so scared that I might have said nothing, if she had not let me know she loved me. What I was afraid of was not social ostracism or the power of the name lesbian, because I already thought homosexuality was necessary to our liberation. I was simply afraid to find out that this too was a fraud and be left with nothing. But somehow my love was greater than my fear. I was clumsy and ignorant of how to make love to another woman, but the first time we slept together I did not mind being these things. I had never felt so completely joyous. I was one individual whole person and she was a different individual whole person and we were loving without trying to obliterate that integrity through possession or control. I was no longer an outside observer watching my body go through the motions. My mind was with my body was with my heart.

I've learned so many things from my loving. I've learned that mutual tenderness and sensitivity are not myths. I've learned to be more easily affectionate and open with myself. I don't have to hate myself for the fact of being a woman, for being the opposite of all I was taught to love and for being unable to communicate with the people I'm supposed to love. Because I love another person, and many other people who are women. I love these people for who they are and I can love them because they can see me and hear me, as I can see them and hear them. I don't have to fight to keep from hating men, because I don't hate them. I no longer have to resent them for my need of them and I am much freer to see them as people instead of tormentors/lovers, and most of all, judges of my validity. Not having that particular resentment gives me more strength to fight against male supremacy as an institution. A desperate need is hostile, resentful. It drains our energy and keeps us from knowing what we want. To want another person as a whole individual whom one likes rather than to need someone as the representative of a valuable group or the possessor of things one wishes one had, is to affirm self love and to begin to really love other people. It also means that as men learn they are not

needed for their maleness, but instead wanted if and only if they are nice people, they might have to learn to be nice people. If we swear undying loyalty and heterosexuality, they may never learn. Power is not given up unless it is obviously hollow and self-destructive. As long as women do not accept as a real alternative, as a real personal possiblity, the end of sexual relationships with men, that power is strengthened and we are trapped into negativism. Affirmation of a new reality is making that kind of power irrelevant. . . . it is speaking in new voices, new words; it is liberation from the categories and myths we were given.

It's really hard to write process, because you end up speaking of ends as well as means and you can sound really visionary. I know homosexual relationships can get messed up by the dominant culture, by being repressed, by playing man-and-woman. I have a thousand million hang ups left, but the important thing is that I would have even more than that if I weren't a lesbian. Women's Liberation needs lesbianism. Lesbians need women's liberation. We are all sisters.

My love for my sister, for my sisters, was and is good and beautiful. I don't see how it can be ignored and if women are to talk about liberation. This does not mean we all have to leap into bed with each other, now or ever. It does mean we can't make homosexuality the one thing we won't talk about honestly. It means we must really accept such love as a positive good, which I think we can do by dealing honestly with our feelings about it and each other. We can't afford to be afraid of these feelings or of our sisters.

Love,

Mary

THE WOMAN-IDENTIFIED WOMAN

What is a lesbian? A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion. She is the woman who, often beginning at an extremely early age, acts in accordance with her inner compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being than her society--perhaps then, but certainly later--cares to allow her. These needs and actions, over a period of years, bring her into painful conflict with people, situations, the accepted ways of thinking, feeling and behaving, until she is in a state of continual war with everything around her, and usually with her self. She may not be fully conscious of the political implications of what for her began as personal necessity, but on some level she has not been able to accept the limitations and oppression laid on her by the most basic role of her society--the female role. The turmoil she experiences tends to induce guilt proportional to the degree to which she feels she is not meeting social expectations, and/or eventually drives her to question and analyse what the rest of her society more or less accepts. She is forced to evolve her own life pattern, often living much of her life alone, learning usually much earlier than her "straight" (heterosexual) sisters about the essential aloneness of life (which the myth of marriage obscures) and about the reality of illusions. To the extent that she cannot expel the heavy socialization that goes with being female, she can never truly find peace with herself. For she is caught somewhere between accepting society's view of her--in which case she cannot accept herself, and coming to understand what this sexist society has done to her and why it is functional and necessary for it to do so. Those of us who work that through find ourselves on the other side of a tortuous journey through a night that may have been decades long. The perspective gained from that journey, the liberation of self, the inner peace, the real love of self and of all women, is something to be shared with all women--because we are all women.

It should first be understood that lesbianism, like male homosexuality, is a category of behavior possible only in a sexist society characterized by rigid sex roles and dominated by male supremacy. Those sex roles dehumanize women by defining us as a supportive/serving caste in relation to the master caste of men, and emotionally cripple men by demanding that they be alienated from their own bodies and emotions in order to perform their economic/political/military functions effectively. Homosexuality is a by-product of a particular way of setting up roles (or approved patterns of behavior) on the basis of sex; as such it is an inauthentic (not consonant with "reality") category. In a society in which men do not oppress women, and sexual expression is allowed to follow feelings, the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality would disappear.

But lesbianism is also different from male homosexuality, and serves a different function in the society. "Dyke" is a different kind of put-down from "faggot," although both imply you are not playing your socially assigned sex role . . are not therefore a "real woman" or a "real man." The grudging admiration felt for the tomboy, and the queasiness felt around a sissy boy point to the same thing: the contempt in which women--or those who play a female role--are held. And the investment in keeping women in that contemptuous role is very great. Lesbian is the word, the label, the condition

that holds women in line. When a woman hears this word tossed her way, she knows she is stepping out of line. She knows that she has crossed the terrible boundary of her sex role. She recoils, she protests, she reshapes her actions to gain approval. Lesbian is a label invested by the Man to throw at any woman who dares to be his equal, who dares to challenge his prerogatives (including that of all women as part of the exchange medium among men), who dares to assert the primacy of her own needs. To have the label applied to people active in women's liberation is just the most recent instance of a long history; older women will recall that not so long ago, any woman who was successful, independent, not orienting her whole life about a man, would hear this word. For in this sexist society, for a woman to be independent means she can't be a woman--she must be a dyke. That in itself should tell us where women are at. It says as clearly as can be said: women and person are contradictory terms. For a lesbian is not considered a "real woman". And yet, in popular thinking, there is really only one essential difference between a lesbian and other women: that of sexual orientation--which is to say, when you strip off all the packaging, you must finally realize that the essence of being a "woman" is to get fucked by men.

"Lesbian" is one of the sexual categories by which men have divided up humanity. While all women are dehumanized as sex objects, as the objects of men they are given certain compensations: identification with his power, his ego, his status, his protection (from other males), feeling like a "real woman," finding social acceptance by adhering to her role, etc. Should a woman confront herself by confronting another woman, there are fewer rationalizations, fewer buffers by which to avoid the stark horror of her dehumanized condition. Herein we find the overriding fear of many women towards exploring intimate relationships with other women: the fear of being used as a sexual object by a woman, which not only will bring her no male-connected compensations, but also will reveal the void which is woman's real situation. This dehumanization is expressed when a straight woman learns that a sister is a lesbian; she begins to relate to her lesbian sister as her potential sex object, laying a surrogate male role on the lesbian. This reveals her heterosexual conditioning to make herself into an object when sex is potentially involved in a relationship, and it denies the lesbian her full humanity. For women, especially those in the movement, to perceive their lesbian sisters through this male grid of role definitions is to accept this male cultural conditinning and to oppress their sisters much as they themselves have been oppressed by men. Are we going to continue the male classification system of defining all females in sexual relation to some other category of people? Affixing the label lesbian not only to a woman who aspires to be a person, but also to any situation of real love, real solidarity, real primacy among women is a primary form of divisiveness among women: it is the condition which keeps women within the confines of the feminine role, and it is the debunking/scare term that keeps women from forming any primary attachments, groups, or associations among ourselves.

Women in the movement have in most cases gone to great lengths to avoid discussion and confrontation with the issue of lesbianism. It puts people up-tight. They are hostile, evasive, or try to incorporate it into some "broader issue." They would rather not talk about it. If they have to, they try to dismiss it as a "lavender herring." But it is no side issue.

It is absolutely essential to the success and fulfillment of the women's liberation movement that this issue be dealt with. As long as the label "dyke" can be used to frighten women into a less militant stand, keep her separate from her sisters, keep her from giving primacy to anything other than men and family--then to that extent she is controlled by the male culture. Until women see in each other the possibility of a primal commitment which includes sexual love, they will be denying themselves the love and value they readily accord to men, thus affirming their second-class status. As long as male acceptability is primary--both to individual women and to the movement as a whole--the term lesbian will be used effectively against women. Insofar as women want only more privileges within the system, they do not want to antagonize male power. They instead seek acceptability for women's liberation, and the most crucial aspect of the acceptability is to deny lesbianism--i.e., deny any fundamental challenge to the basis of the female role.

It should also be said that some younger, more radical women have honestly begun to discuss lesbianism, but so far it has been primarily as a sexual "alternative" to men. This, however, is still giving primacy to men, both because the idea of relating more completely to women occurs as a negative reaction to men, and because the lesbian relationship is being characterized simply by sex which is divisive and sexist. On one level, which is both personal and political, women may withdraw emotional and sexual energies from men, and work out various alternatives for those energies in their own lives. On a different political/psychological level, it must be understood that what is crucial is that women begin disengaging from male-defined response patterns. In the privacy of our own psyches, we must cut those cords to the core. For irrespective of where our love and sexual energies flow, if we are male-identified in our heads, we cannot realize our autonomy as human beings.

But why is it that women have related to and through men? By virtue of having been brought up in a male society, we have internalized the male culture's definition of ourselves. That definition views us as relative beings who exist not for ourselves, but for the servicing, maintenance and comfort of men. That definition consigns us to sexual and family functions, and excludes us from defining and shaping the terms of our lives. In exchange for our psychic servicing and for performing society's non-profit-making functions, the man confers on us just one thing: the slave status which makes us legitimate in the eyes of the society in which we live. This is called "feminity " or"being a real woman" in our cultural lingo. We are authentic, legitimate, real to the extent that we are the property of some man whose name we bear. To be a woman who belongs to no man is to be invisible, pathetic, inauthentic, unreal. He confirms his image of us--of what we have to be in order to be acceptable by him--but not our real selves; he confirms our womanhood--as he defines it, in relation to him--but cannot confirm our personhood, our own selves as absolutes. As long as we are dependent on the male culture for this definition, for this approval, we cannot be free.

The consequence of internalizing this role is an enormous reservoir of self-hate. This is not to say the self-hate is recognized or accepted as such; indeed most women would deny it. It may be experienced as discomfort

with her role, as feeling empty, as numbness, as restlessness, a paralyzing anxiety at the center. Alternatively, it may be expressed in shrill defensiveness of the glory and destiny of her role. But it does exist, often beneath the edge of her consciousness, poisoning her existence, keeping her alienated from herself, her own needs, and rendering her a stranger to other women. Women hate both themselves and other women.They try to escape by identifying with the oppressor, living through him, gaining status and identity from his ego, his power, his accomplishments. And by not identifying with other "empty vessels" like themselves. Women resist relating on all levels to other women who will reflect their own oppression, their own secondary status, their own self-hate. For to confront another woman is finally to confront one's self--the self we have gone to such lengths to avoid. And in that mirror we know we cannot really respect and love that which we have been made to be.

As the source of self-hate and the lack of real self are rooted in our male-given identity, we must create a new sense of self. As long as we cling to the idea of "being a woman," we will sense some conflict with that incipient self; that sense of I, that sense of a whole person. It is very difficult to realize and accept that being "feminine" and being a whole person are irreconcilable. Only women can give each other a new sense of self. That identity we have to develop with reference to ourselves, and not in relation to men. This consciousness is the revolutionary force from which all else will follow, for ours is an organic revolution. For this we must be available and supportive to one another, give our commitment and our love, give the emotional support necessary to sustain this movement. Our energies must flow toward our sisters, not backwards towards our oppressors. As long as women's liberation tries to free women without facing the basic heterosexual structure that binds us in one-to-one relationship with our own oppressors, tremendous energies will continue to flow into trying to straighten up each particular relationship with a man, how to get better sex, how to turn his head around--into trying to make the "new man" out of him, in the delusion that this will alow us to be the "new woman." This obviously splits our energies and commitments, leaving us unable to be committed to the construction of the new patterns which will liberate us.

It is the primacy of women relating to women, of women creating a new consciousness of and with each other which is at the heart of women's liberation, and the basis for the cultural revolution. Together we must find, reinforce and validate our authentic selves. As we do this, we confirm in each other that struggling incipient sense of pride and strength, the divisive barriers begin to melt, we feel this growing solidarity with our sisters. We see ourselves as prime, find our centers inside of ourselves. We find receding the sense of alienation, of being cut off, of being behind a locked window, of being unable to get out what we know is inside. We feel a realness, feel at last we are coinciding with ourselves. With that real self, with that consciousness, we begin a revolution to end the imposition of all coercive identifications, and to achieve maximum autonomy in human expression.

New York Radicalesbians
May 1970

I AM 23 A MOTHER AND A LESBIAN

I am 23, a mother and a lesbian. Although I have been in the Women's Liberation movement for more than a year, it is only recently that I told the sisters in my group that I am a lesbian. Whenever the subject of lesbianism came up, my head spun, my hands sweated and I wanted to run. I am just finding out that there are many women who like myself are in Women's Liberation and have kept underground about their lesbianism. I am also finding out that because a woman is in Women's Liberation, it does not mean that she automatically supports lesbianism.

I am writing this because I want my sisters to know how I feel, and my sisters include both lesbians and those who are not. My sisters include those who already see lesbianism as a positive possibility and those who have fears and feel threatened by lesbianism.

At this point in Womens Liberation, one of the worst things to be accused of is being "Anti-Lesbian" which has created a wave of verbal support for lesbians and not much more. It is no new thing that whenever women have tried to band together in some political action, men have used the taunt of Lesbian as a device to keep women apart and powerless. There are very real reasons why women cannot do more than give their verbal support to lesbians. I, for one do not agree with those who say that the "pro woman" line has to be supported down the line. As I see it the "pro woman" means that you support a sister's right to act although you may not personally want to do it. To be pro woman means to understand why a woman would do a certain thing, to understand her situation and the alternatives, but it does not mean that you agree with her, or would want to do the same.

I feel that it is wrong and anti woman for one sister to jump on another sister who expresses fear about lesbianism. To be anti woman is to be unwilling to understand the situation of another sister which forces her to act in a certain way. To insist that every woman have a sexual relationship with another sister to prove she supports lesbianism, or to demand that every woman march in the "gay pride week" is a very naive demand since it totally disregards the situation of another sister which forces her to act in certain ways. At this time in our movement the stakes are still too high for many women. I mean, for women who are still involved with a man who want to be involved with a man, there are very real reasons why she would not be able to give more than verbal support for lesbians. Unless every woman pledges to support lesbianism, some women will bear the brunt of the harassment and ridicule that is meted out to lesbians and those who support us.

The fear of being accused of being a lesbian has reached out like a plague and has served to divide women, those who are lesbians and those who are not. Certainly, if we are to have any mass movement with a broad base (including all women), we need all women working together. If lesbians start getting more support from homosexual men, than from their sisters--well, we are in real trouble. At this point, for myself, I am struggling very hard to stay in a group of both lesbian women and non lesbian women. I feel that it is in my best interest to stay in a mixed group, since the

only way to get support from all women is to help them to understand what lesbianism is all about, and hope that they too will see lesbianism as also in their best interest. As long as lesbians are still treated as criminals and subjected to harassment, ridicule and kept out of jobs, and forced to hide, it means that Every woman walks in the shadow of fear, it means that the alternatives to All women are limited. As long as Lesbians are still treated as perverts, and "sick", it means that any woman who wants to live as she sees fit, still can be treated the same way. Any woman who rejects the male structure can be prepared to have a long fight ahead of her, unless all women can support each other in their individual struggle. Every woman should have as many alternatives open to her as possible, and she should know about them all. Lesbianism is one alternative--just as is celibacy. The only way women can find out about lesbianism is through an equal exchange of ideas, and this cannot be done unless all women regardless of their sexual preferences feel free and comfortable in expressing their feelings without the fear of being put down for having anti lesbian feelings.

Another problem which exists in mixed groups (lesbian and non lesbian women) is the unspoken, but obvious feeling that many women are uncomfortable when a lesbian gives testimony. The fear seems to begin when a sister finds out that another sister is a lesbian. Immediately you can feel the tension --the affectionate hugs become material for suspect "overt lesbian aggression?" I have had women say to me in no uncertain terms that once they found out I was a lesbian, they felt differently towards me. One sister told me that when she knows a woman is a lesbian she feels differently toward her because a "sexual relationship" is possible and it makes her feel uncomfortable. The idea that every lesbian is out to make all her sisters, is one which has kept women from expressing their feelings in a mixed group. I cannot speak for all lesbians, but for myself, I am not on the "make" all the time, nor would I want to sleep with every sister. I do not see my sisters as sex objects--but as real people.

Another thing which bothers me is the feeling that many women have about the "support lesbian line". For me this line does not mean all non lesbians should become lesbians to prove their support. But what it does mean is that women must stop being defensive about being called a lesbian. I have seen men call a woman a lesbian, and the immediate reaction of the woman is one of horror and quick defense, as if the term lesbian was really perverted. Men know that the accusation of lesbian frightens women and so they use it as a weapon against us. Falling into the defensive trap is dangerous for the whole movement. A supportive reaction would be to say, "Whether or not I am a lesbian is irrelevent to the point or issue or whatever else is at issue." Another supportive reaction would be to refuse to answer whether or not you are married since men are less likely to accuse a married woman of being a lesbian, and so saying you are married leaves all single women open to easy fire. The status which marriage holds in the eyes of men should not be used for protection.

One other point that I would like to make concerns the way in which non lesbian women treat lesbian women. First let me say that I do not consider a woman a lesbian who although having a sexual relationship with a woman also has a sexual relationship with a man. The full emotional satisfaction of an intense relationship between two women--what I like to think

of as Lesbianism--cannot be there if one of the women is still tied to a relationship with her oppressor. It is true that many married women are getting involved with female homosexuality, but they also continue to have a sexual relationship with their husbands. There are also women who live with men and have either very limited sexual relationships with the men they live with, but also have a good sexual relationship with other women. For any woman involved with a man on either a sexual or emotional level and who also has an involvement with a woman--the relationship between the two women is unequal and cannot share the same intensity of feeling. When one woman is able to have some of her need filled by a man, the relationship between the two women can never be equal. It might be very true that the woman involved with a man is just not ready to give up her man for either economic reasons, social or emotional or for the status and privileges which a woman and a man enjoy, but all these reasons do not make it right or fair for a woman to be involved with another woman. Any woman who is involved with a man and also a woman, MUST tell the other woman of her involvement and also tell the other woman that the relationship is unequal and that the unattached woman has more to lose in the relationship. It must also be understood that both women are losing the full satisfactions of a really complete relationship.

I know of many women who still married to men, are sexually involved with a woman because they say that their sexual life with their husbands are so bad, and they enjoy sex with a woman more. It is no new complaint that women are not satisfied by their men, but what is new is that many women enter into a relationship with a woman for purely sexual reasons. It is at this point that the whole area of sexual exploitation comes in. It really makes me very sad to know that women use other women as sexual objects in the same way that men have treated us all our life. The reason that men do not satisfy women is because MEN CANNOT LOVE. Unless a man can feel the pain of each woman--he cannot love, and being unable to love means being unable to give. Any satisfying relationship both emotional and sexual must be a give and sharing--not even give and take. Certainly if men cannot love they cannot give nor share--but take. Women enjoy sex with another woman because women are the ones who have always loved, who have always given, who have been taken from. Women know the pain of each other. There is nothing magical about why women enjoy sex with women--because there is real concern, because there is real love the entire relationship is satisfying, and sex is only a part of a very complete and satisfying relationship.

Women must stop thinking of other women as sex objects, but as fuller people. Whereas men have sex which they call "love", women love and their love has no boundaries. Whereas men prove their manliness by the number of lays, women need not prove themselves by their sexual ability, but by their love. Women base their relationship on love, whereas men base theirs on sex.

It is very oppressive to me as a woman and a lesbian to have other women think of me as a mere sexual object. I have spent many hours with women who when discussing other women only talk about their physical appearance. She has firm breasts, that one has a small ass, that one doesn't have stretch marks, and so on. It really disgusted me to hear them talking because it sounded just like men. I do not want to be thought of as a bra size, or how fuckable I am, I want to be thought of as a person. OK, it is

true that women have been indoctrinated by the whole male definitions of beauty and desirability, but women must really be conscious of the fact that men have defined us, and we must find new ways to define each other (women) instead of using all the male jargon and standards. Even within the lesbian scene, there is definitely a male standard of beauty. Once again the lean, well proportioned woman (and young) is most desirable. Again, looks have priority. Women have always had to live up to male standards or else be willing to be very lonely, and it is time it stopped. It is time that each woman be seen as a human being. I would like to be able to sign my name. I would like my relationship with a woman to be as accepted and as regarded as the relationship between a man and a woman. I cannot sign my name, nor can I love openly because the consequences are still too high. I do not want to hassle with all the shit that is thrown at lesbians. If the movement were older and stronger, if a real political stand was taken on lesbianism, if I felt that I had support from all my sisters, I would sign my name and do it proudly. For now I have to hide.

One last thing--it has only been since my involvement with Womens Liberation that I have really felt good about being a lesbian that I have felt good about being a woman, and that I have felt good about all women. Men cannot frighten me anymore with their accusations and threats, because I do have some support. For the first time in my life there is something I would die for--my freedom and the freedom of all women. If men are afraid of us, they have reason to be. The idea of losing your power is frightening when you know it will be taken from you. To quote from an article by Robin Morgan--"we are the women our men have warned us against."

Women of the world unite--we have nothing to lose but our oppression.

A Redstockings sister
RAT August 1970